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HIS GREAT
ADVENTURE
ROBERT HERRICK

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HIS GREAT ADVENTURE



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**"SHE DREW UP A FEW RODS FROM THE CENTER OF ACTIVITY
AND STOOD THERE IN THE TWILIGHT"**

HIS GREAT ADVENTURE

BY

ROBERT HERRICK

AUTHOR OF "TOGETHER," "ONE WOMAN'S LIFE"
"THE COMMON LOT," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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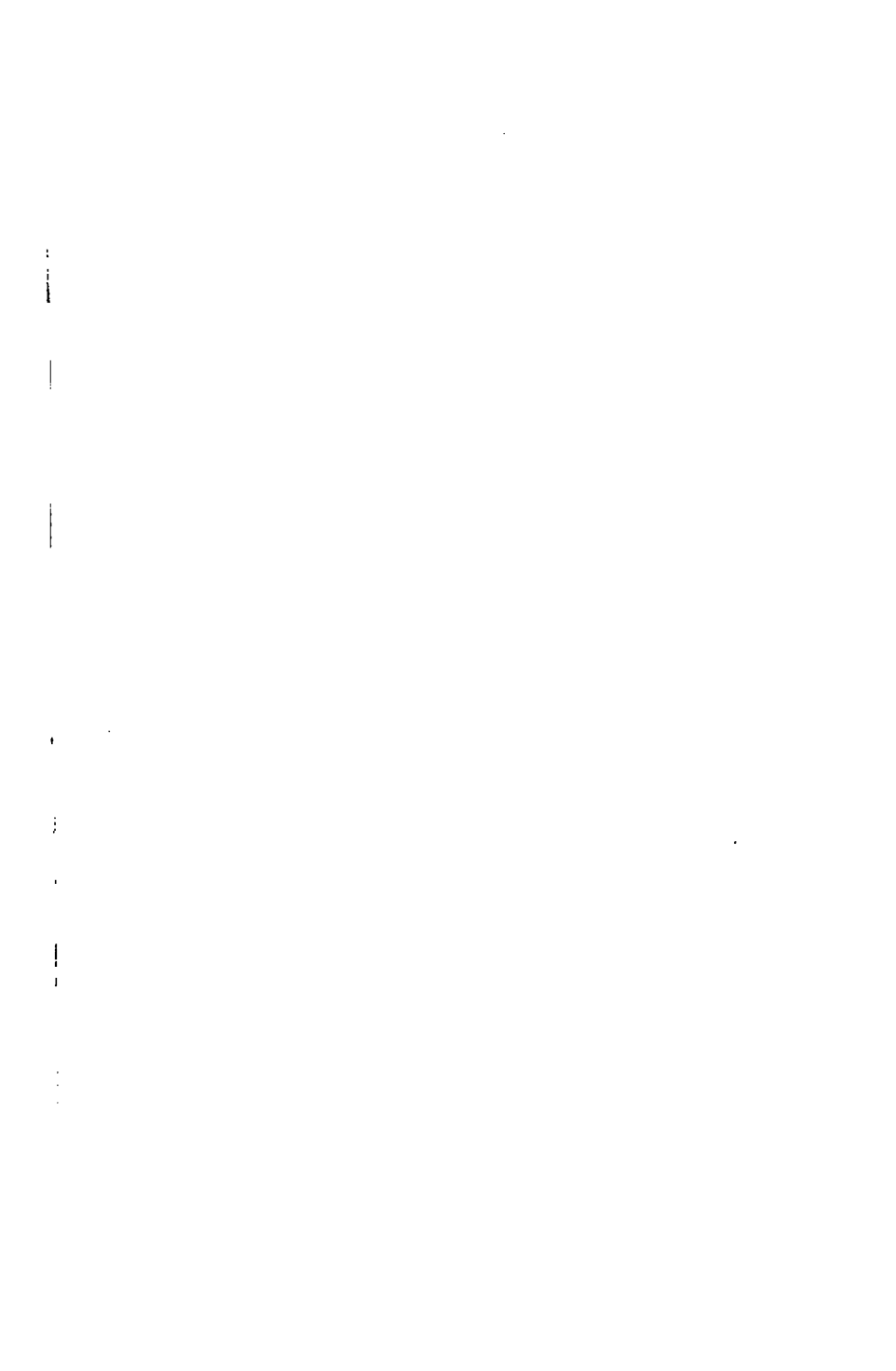
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HIS GREAT ADVENTURE

PART I
FORTUNE



HIS GREAT ADVENTURE

I

It was dusk of an April day, and Fifth Avenue was crowded. A young man, who had emerged from a large hotel, stood in the stream of traffic and gazed irresolutely up and down the thoroughfare. He wore a long, cheap rain-coat, and his head was covered by a steamer-cap of an old design, with two flaps tied in a knot across the top, behind which an overabundant crop of dull black hair pushed forth.

His thin, sallow face was unshaven, and his eyes were rimmed by round steel spectacles that gave him an almost owlsh expression. An air of dejection hung about him, as he loitered by the curb — not the imaginative depression of youth, soon to float off like a cloud before the sun of life, but rather the settled gloom of repeated failure, as if the conviction of final doom had already begun to penetrate deeply into his manhood.

He looked first up the avenue, then down, vacant of purpose, seeing nothing in the moving pageant. Finally, as if aroused by certain curious

glances that the less hurried passers-by cast on him, he bestirred himself and moved on down the avenue, his shoulders stooped, his legs trailing wearily.

Thus he proceeded for several blocks, never raising his head, stopping mechanically at the street crossings, resuming his discouraged pace as the crowd moved on. Once he plunged his hand into his coat pocket, to assure himself of some possession, and then withdrew it with a bitter smile for his unconscious anxiety.

When in this vacant promenade he had reached the lower part of the avenue, where the crowd was less dense, and less gay and rich in appearance, he lifted his head and looked musingly into the misty space before him.

"Well," he muttered, with tightening lips, "it's only one more throw-down. I ought to be used to 'em by now!"

Nevertheless, his face relapsed into its melancholy expression as he turned into one of the side streets with the unconscious precision of the animal following a beaten path to its hole.

He crossed several of the shabbier commercial avenues, which were crowded with traffic and blocked by men and women returning from the day's work. Compared with these tired laborers, he seemed to have a large leisure — the freedom

of absolute poverty. His thoughts had turned to supper. Should he buy a roll and a piece of pie at the bakery on the next corner, or — mad venture! — dissipate his last resources at the saloon opposite, where the Italian wife of the Irish proprietor offered appetizing nourishment for a quarter?

Meditating upon this important decision, the young man entered his own block. At one end the elevated trains rattled; at the other, heavy drays lumbered past in an unbroken file on their way to the ferries; but between the two there was a strip of quiet, where the dingy old houses were withdrawn from the street, and in front of them a few dusty shrubs struggled for life in the bare plots of earth.

In the middle of this block there was an unusually animated scene. A group of children had huddled together about some object of interest. A horse must have fallen on the pavement, the young man thought dully, or there was a fight, or a policeman had made a capture.

He hurried his lagging steps, moved by a boyish curiosity. As he drew nearer, he perceived that the circle was too small to contain a horse or a good scrap. The center of interest must be some unfortunate human being. He shouldered his way through the crowd.

"What's up?" he asked of a small boy.

"A drunk," was the laconic reply.

Looking over the heads of the boys, the young man could see the figure of a stoutish, well-dressed man lying prone on the pavement. His black coat was spattered with mud, his gray hair rumpled. His eyes were closed, and through the open lips his tongue protruded.

"Say, he's bad!" the boy observed knowingly.

"Just look at him!"

A convulsion shook the prostrate figure. The face began to twitch, and one arm waved violently, beating the air. One or two more mature passers-by who had been attracted by the disturbance drew off, with the selfish city excuse that the proper authorities would come in time and attend to the nuisance. Not so the idle young man.

"He isn't drunk!" he exclaimed, pushing his way into the circle and stooping over the figure. He had seen too many plain "drunks" in his newspaper days to be deceived in the symptoms.

"There he goes again!" the boys shouted.

"He has some sort of fit. Here, one of you give me a hand, and we'll get him off the street!"

The boys readily helped the young man to drag the prostrate figure to the nearest steps, and one of them ran to the corner after a policeman.

When the officer arrived, the young man, who had steadied the stranger through another convulsion, said :

“You’ll have to call an ambulance. We’d better carry him somewhere — can’t let him lie here in the street like a dog. We can take him to my room.”

He motioned toward the next house, and with the officer’s assistance carried the sick man into the rear room on the first floor, which he unlocked. Then the policeman drove the curious boys out of the house and went off to summon the ambulance. Left alone, the young man dipped a towel in his water-pitcher, wet the sick man’s brow, then wiped his face and cleaned the foam and dirt from his beard and lips.

The stranger, lying with half-closed eyes, looked to be rather more than sixty years of age. Judging from the quality of his clothes, and from his smooth hands, he was a well-to-do business man. Presently his eyelids began to twitch, then the whole face; the right leg shot out and beat the air; then the right arm began to wave, and foam oozed from his lips.

“I wish they’d hurry that ambulance!” the young man thought, as he wiped the sick man’s face again with the damp towel. “He won’t last long, at this rate!”

This convulsion gradually passed off as the others had, and the stranger lay once more as if dead, his eyes almost wholly closed. The young man went to the door and listened nervously, then returned to the prostrate form, unbuttoned the coat, and felt for the heart. Immediately the sick man opened his eyes, and, looking directly into the eyes of the man bending over him, tried to raise his hand, as if he would protect himself from a blow.

"It's all right!" the young man said reassuringly. "I was just feeling for your heart, friend."

The sick man's lips twitched desperately; and finally, in the faintest whisper, he managed to stammer:

"Wh—who are you?"

"One Edgar Brainard," the young man replied promptly. "Let me unfasten this vest and make you more comfortable."

"N-n-no!" the sick man gasped suspiciously.

He managed to clutch Brainard's wrist with his wavering right hand; his left lay quite powerless by his side. His eyes closed again, but the lips moved silently, as if he were trying to frame sounds.

"He's going this time, sure!"

The young man slipped his wrist from the feeble grasp, inserted a pillow under the sick man's head, and sat back to wait.

II

It was very still in that back room. No step sounded in the hall, and the noise from the street came muffled. In the stillness, the sick man's desperate efforts to breathe filled the little room with painful sounds. Brainard felt the stifling approach of death, and opened the window wide to get what air would come in from the small court outside.

He studied the figure on the lounge more closely. The thick, red under lip curled over the roots of the gray beard. A short, thick nose gave the face a look of strong will, even of obstinacy. There was a foreign expression to the features that might indicate German descent.

On the third finger of his right hand, the sick man wore an old, plain gold ring, which had sunk deep into the flesh. From the inside pocket of his short coat bulged a thick wallet, over which his right hand rested, as if to guard precious possessions.

"He thought I was going to rob him!" Brainard observed. "Expect he's been up against it already — and that's what's the trouble."

It was quite dark. The young man lighted a gas-jet, then went again to the door. As he stood there, listening, he felt the old man's eyes on him, and turned to look at him. The eyes, now wide open, held him, asking what the lips refused to utter.

Brainard went back to his patient and leaned over to catch the flutter from the moving lips. At last, as if with great exertion, the murmur came :

"Wh-wh-what are you go-going to do — to do — with me?"

In spite of the faintness of the whisper, it was the voice of one accustomed to being answered.

"I've sent an officer for an ambulance," Brainard replied. "It ought to be here before now, I should think. They'll take you to some hospital and fix you up," he added encouragingly.

The lips twitched into a semblance of a smile, then mumbled :

"No — not — th-this time."

"What's the matter — accident?" Brainard asked.

The sick man did not attempt to reply, as if he considered the question of trifling importance. Instead, his eyes studied the young man's face intently. Evidently his brain was clearing from the shock, whatever had caused it, and he was revolving some purpose. Soon the lips began to

move once more, and Brainard bent close to catch the faint sounds.

"Wh-wh-what's your bus-bus-i-ness?"

"Oh, I've had lots of businesses," the young man replied carelessly. "Been on a newspaper, in the ad business, real estate, and so on." He added after a moment, with a little ironical laugh, "Just now I'm in the literary business — a dramatist."

The sick man looked puzzled, and frowned, as if disappointed. Perhaps his cloudy brain could not assort this information with his purpose. Presently his brow contracted, his face twitched violently, the right leg shot out.

"I say! It's too bad," the young man exclaimed sympathetically. "I wish I knew what to do for you. Where can that ambulance be?" He laid one hand on the sick man's hot brow, and held his arm with the other. "Easy now!" he exclaimed, as the right arm began whirling. "There! Steady! It's going off."

Instead of closing his eyes, as he had done after the previous attacks, and relapsing into coma, the sick man made an immediate effort to speak.

"Co-come here," he articulated faintly. "Im-por-tant, very im-por-tant."

He groped feebly for his inner pocket.

"You want me to take out this bundle?"

Brainard asked, laying his hand on the bulky wallet.

The man made an affirmative sign, and kept his eyes steadily on Brainard while the latter gently extracted the pocketbook.

"You — you will do something for me?" the stranger said more distinctly than he had hitherto spoken, as if urgency were clearing his mind. "You can — you can start to-night?"

"I'm not very busy," the young man said, with a laugh. "I guess I could start for Hong-Kong on a few minutes' notice."

"Not Hong-Kong," the old man labored forth literally. "You're honest?"

It was said in a tone of self-conviction rather than of question.

"Oh, I guess so," the young man answered lightly. "At least, what's called honest — never had a chance to steal anything worth taking!" He added more seriously, to quiet the sick man, who seemed to be laboring under excitement, "Tell me what you want done, and I'll do my best to put it through for you."

The sick man's eyes expressed relief, and then his brow contracted, as if he were summoning all his powers in a final effort to make a clogged brain do his urgent will.

"Lis-lis-listen," he murmured. "No — no,

write — write it down,” he went on, as Brainard leaned forward.

Brainard looked about his bare room for paper, but in vain. He felt in his pockets for a stray envelope, then drew from his overcoat a roll of manuscript. He glanced at it dubiously for a moment, then tore off the last sheet, which had on one side a few lines of typewriting. With a gesture of indifference, he turned to the sick man and prepared to take his message.

“All ready,” he remarked. “I can take it in shorthand, if you want.”

“Sev-en, thir-ty-one, and four. Sev-en, thir-ty-one, and four. Sev-en, thir-ty-one, and four,” he repeated almost briskly.

Brainard looked at him inquiringly, and the stranger whispered the explanation :

“Combi-na-tion pri-vate safe — understand?”

Brainard nodded.

“Where?”

“Office — San Francisco.”

The young man whistled.

“That’s a good ways off! What do you want me to do there?”

“Take *everything*.”

“What shall I do with the stuff? Bring it here to New York?” the young man inquired, with growing curiosity.

The sick man's blue eyes stared at him steadily, with a look of full intelligence.

"I shall be dead then," he mumbled.

"Oh, I hope not !" Brainard remarked.

But with unflinching eyes, the sick man continued :

"You must have — pow-er — pow-er of attorney."

He brought the words out with difficulty, not wasting his strength by discussing his chances of recovery. He was evidently growing weaker, and Brainard had to bend close to his lips in order to catch the faint whisper, "Take it down !"

And with his face beginning to twitch, and the convulsive tremors running over his body, the sick man summoned all his will and managed to dictate a power of attorney in legal terms, as if he were familiar with the formula. When he had finished, his eyes closed, and his lips remained open. Brainard dropped his paper and felt for the sick man's heart. It was still beating faintly.

After a few moments, the eyes opened mistily, and again the man made an effort to collect himself for another effort.

"What shall I do with the stuff ?" Brainard inquired.

"Ge-get it out of the country. Take it to — to Ber-Ber-Ber —"

"Bermuda?" Brainard suggested.

"*Berlin!*" the sick man corrected with a frown. As if to impress his messenger with the seriousness of his work, he added, "If you don't get away, they'll — kill you."

"Oh!" Brainard exclaimed, impressed.

The blue eyes examined the young man steadily, as if they would test his metal. Then, satisfied, the man murmured:

"Quick — must — sign — quick! Now!" he concluded, as his face began to twitch.

Brainard handed him a pen, and held his right arm to steady him while he scrawled his name — "H. Krutzmacht." The sick man traced the letters slowly, patiently, persisting until he had dashed a heavy line across the t's and another beneath the name; then he dropped the pen and closed his eyes.

When another moment of control came to him, he whispered uneasily:

"Witness? Must have witness."

"We'll find some one — don't worry," the young man replied lightly. "The ambulance man, when he comes, if he ever does come!"

Brainard did not yet take very seriously the idea of starting that night for San Francisco to rifle a safe.

"Mo-mo-money," the voice began, and the

eyes wandered to the fat wallet which Brainard had deposited on the table.

Brainard lifted the wallet.

“Plen-plen-plenty of mon-money !”

“I understand,” the young man replied. “There’s enough cash for the journey in here.”

As he laid the wallet down, there was the welcome sound of feet in the passage outside, and with an exclamation of relief the young man flung open the door. The ambulance surgeon was there with an assistant and a stretcher. With a muttered explanation for his delay, the doctor went at once to the sick man and examined him, while Brainard told what he knew of his strange guest.

“Tries to talk all the time — must be something on his mind !” he said, as another convulsion seized the sick man. “Been doped, I should say.”

“Looks like brain trouble, sure,” the ambulance surgeon remarked, watching the stranger closely. “He can’t last long that way. Well, we’d better hustle him to the hospital as soon as we can.”

They had the sick man on the stretcher before he had opened his eyes from his last attack. As they lifted him, he mumbled excitedly, and Brainard, listening close to his lips, thought he understood what was troubling him.

"He wants that paper witnessed," he explained. "I forgot — it's something he dictated to me."

"Well, hurry up about it," the surgeon replied carelessly, willing to humor the sick man. "Here!"

Brainard dipped his pen in the ink-bottle and handed it to the surgeon, who lightly dashed down his signature at the bottom of the sheet, without reading it.

"Now are we ready?" the doctor demanded impatiently.

But the blue eyes arrested Brainard, and the young man, stooping over the stretcher, caught a faint whisper:

"You'll g-g-go?"

"Sure!"

"Gi-gi-give it all to —"

Krutzmacht struggled hard to pronounce a name, but he could not utter the word.

"It's no use!" the doctor exclaimed. "Tell him to wait until he's better."

But Brainard, moved by the sick man's intense look of mental distress, raised his hand to the doctor and listened. At last the whispered syllable reached his ear:

"M-M-Mel —"

"I tell you it's no use!" the ambulance doctor

repeated irritably. "They'll find out at the hospital what he wants done. Come on!"

As they bore the stretcher through the narrow door, the agonized expression gave way, and the sick man articulated more distinctly:

"Mel-Melo —"

"Melo-melodrama!" Brainard said. "It's all right, my friend. Don't worry — I'll fix it up for you!"

With astonishing distinctness came back the one word:

"Melody!"

"All right — Melody!"

The sick man would have said more, but the ambulance men bore him swiftly to the waiting vehicle and shoved him in.

"Will you come along?" the doctor asked.

"No. I'll look in some time to-morrow, probably — St. Joseph's, isn't it?"

The sick man's eyes still rested on Brainard, when the latter poked his head into the dark ambulance. They seemed to glow with a full intelligence, and also with a command, as if they said:

"Do just what I've told you to do!"

"He knows what he wants, even if he can't say it," Brainard muttered to himself as the ambulance moved off. "Poor old boy!"

III

WHEN Brainard opened the door of his room, he heard the rustle of papers on the floor, blown about by the draft from the window. He lighted his lamp and picked up the loose sheets, which were the typewritten leaves of his last play — the one that he had finally got back that very afternoon from a famous actor-manager, without even the usual note of polite regret from the secretary. The absence of that familiar note had dejected him especially.

He shoved the rejected play into his table drawer indifferently, thinking of the sick man's last urgent look, and of the terrible effort he had made to articulate his final words. What did he mean by "Melody"? Perhaps the old fellow was really out of his head, and all the rest about his valuable papers in some private safe at the other end of the continent was mythical — the fancy of an unhinged mind.

But the memory of the old man's face — of those keen blue eyes — made Brainard reject such a commonplace solution of the puzzle. The

sick man had been in this room with him for a full half-hour, and the place still seemed filled with his positive, commanding personality.

No! The man who signed "H. Krutzmacht" to the sheet lying on the table before him was no vague lunatic. Though he might be at the extremity of life, almost unable to articulate, nevertheless his purpose was clear to himself, and his will was as strong as ever.

Brainard was hungry. Snatching up his old cap, he went out to the neighboring avenue, and, without hesitation, entered the most expensive restaurant in sight — a resort he frequented only on rare days of opulence. Instead of the oyster-stew and doughnuts which had latterly been his luxurious limit, he ordered a good dinner, as if he had earned it, and devoured the food without the usual qualms of prudence.

His spirits had undergone a marvelous change from the timid, fearful state in which he had been that afternoon. He wondered at his own confidence. Complacently selecting a good cigar at the cashier's desk, he strolled back to his room, his body peacefully engaged in the unaccustomed task of digesting a full meal.

When he entered his dreary little room, his eye fell upon the wallet, which lay under the table where he had dropped it. What was he going to

do with that — with this whole Krutzmacht business? Why, simply nothing at all. In the morning, he would go around to St. Joseph's and see how the sick man was. If Krutzmacht recovered, there was nothing to do but to return his pocketbook. But if he got worse, or was dead already? Well, Brainard could turn the wallet over to the hospital people or the coroner, and that would end the affair for him.

With this prudent resolution he took his play from the drawer, and looked it over. His interest in the thing had quite gone, and the sting of its rejection no longer smarted. Very likely it was as bad as the managers to whom he had submitted it seemed to think. He tied the manuscript together with a piece of twine, and shoved it back into the drawer.

One sheet — that last one on which he had taken down Krutzmacht's dictation — was missing from this roll. That sheet contained his final curtain. He looked at the lines, and smiled as he read. The Lady Violet was parting from her lover, with the following dialogue :

VIOLET. — Oh, Alexander !

ALEXANDER. — Violet !

VIOLET. — What will you do, dearest ?

ALEXANDER. — I go on my great adventure !

VIOLET. — Your great adventure ?

ALEXANDER. — Life !

He turned the sheet over. On the other side were the few shorthand notes he had hastily jotted down — the figures of the safe combination and the power of attorney with its legal phrases, the latter written out again below in long hand. At the bottom of the sheet, just beneath Alexander's heroic announcement to Violet, were the three signatures. The old man's blunt name dominated the others — a firm, black scrawl with a couple of vicious dashes.

The powerful will of the sick man, working in what might be the agony of death, spoke in that signature. Brainard felt that there was something mysterious in it. The name spoke to him as the eyes had spoken to him, personally. Criminal? Possibly. Dramatic? Oh, surely! He felt instinctively that there was more drama on this side of the sheet than on the other.

He folded the paper carefully and put it in his inner pocket. It would be an interesting souvenir.

As the young man sat and smoked in his little room, the comfort of his abundant meal penetrating his person, he felt more and more the drama of actual life touching him, calling to him to take a hand in it. He reached unconsciously for the fat wallet, and opened it. There were some legal papers — contracts and leases and agreements, at which Brainard merely glanced.

He felt into the inner recesses of the old-fashioned wallet, and from one pocket extracted a thick sheaf of bank-notes. They were in large denominations — hundreds, fifties, and twenties. Brainard smoothed out the bills on his knee and carefully counted them; in all there was rather more than four thousand dollars.

“The old boy traveled with quite a wad!” he muttered, fingering the crisp bills.

The touch of the money gave a curious electric thrill to his thoughts. Here was an evidence of reality that made the old man’s mumbled words and intense effort assume a reasonable shape. When Krutzmacht let Brainard take possession of this wallet, he knew what it contained. He trusted to a stranger in his desperate need.

Still feeling around in the folds of the wallet, Brainard extracted a railroad-ticket of voluminous length for San Francisco.

“He was on his way to the train!” Brainard exclaimed, and added unconsciously, “when they got him and did him up!”

Already his busy mind had accepted the hypothesis of enemies and foul play rather than that of disease.

With the railroad-ticket and the money in his hand, he stood staring before him, still debating the matter. Something seemed to rise within

him, some determination — a spirit of daring which he had not felt for years.

Mechanically he put the papers and bank-notes back into the wallet, and shoved it into his pocket. Then he looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock. If he was to leave to-night, as the old man had ordered, there was no more time to lose.

Without further hesitation, he threw a few articles into an old bag and started for the ferry. On the way he stopped to telephone the hospital. After a delay which made him impatient, he learned that the sick man was resting quietly — “still unconscious,” the nurse said. So he had not spoken again.

When Brainard reached the station in Jersey City, having a few moments to spare, he wrote a brief note to the hospital authorities, saying that he was leaving the city on business, and would call on his return in a week or ten days. He inclosed several bank-notes, requesting that the sick man should have every comfort. Having dropped his letter into the box he stepped into the Chicago sleeper. The exhilarating beat of his heart told him that he had done well.

The disdainful look that the porter had given him when he took charge of his shabby bag, as well as the curious glances of his fellow passengers, the next morning, made Brainard conscious of his

eccentric appearance. But all that he could do, for the present, to improve his neglected person, was to have himself shaved and his hair cut. He was obliged to keep his rain-coat on, although the car was hot, in order to cover up a large hole in his trousers — the only pair he possessed.

He resolved to employ the few hours in Chicago, between trains, in making himself as decent as possible. Meanwhile he ate three good meals and furtively watched his more prosperous fellow travelers.

IV

It was a very different person, in appearance, who seated himself on the observation platform of the Overland Limited that evening. Only the round steel spectacles were left as a memento of Brainard's former condition. He had had no scruples in helping himself freely from the store of bills in the wallet. What lay before him to do for the sick man would probably be difficult, in any event, and it would be foolish to handicap himself by presenting a suspicious appearance at Krutzmacht's office. He would play his part properly dressed.

So, when he glanced into the little mirror beside his berth, he smiled in satisfaction at the clean-shaven, neatly dressed, alert young man who looked back at him. With his ragged habiliments he seemed also to have discarded that settled look of failure, and not a few of his years. Without unduly flattering himself, he felt that he might easily be taken for one of the energetic young brokers or lawyers whom he observed on the train.

Removing his new hat, and stretching his well-shod feet on the cushioned seat opposite, he took

up the evening newspapers and glanced through them for some telegraphic item about the fate of his mysterious employer. If Krutzmacht were a well-known figure, as he supposed likely, reporters must doubtless have discovered him before this and proclaimed his predicament to the world. But Brainard could find no reference to any such person in the newspapers, and with a sigh of relief he let them slip from his lap.

His task would be easier, if it could be accomplished while the sick man lay undiscovered in the hospital. If he should already be dead, when he arrived, there would be an end to Brainard's job altogether; and that would have been a keen disappointment to the young man.

His job? A hundred times his mind reverted to this perplexing consideration — what, exactly, was he to do when he had reached the end of his long journey?

First, he would find where Krutzmacht's offices were, and then? He had been told to make off with whatever he might find in the private safe. For this purpose he had provided himself, in Chicago, with a bulky leather valise, in which his discarded raiment was now reposing. It all sounded like an expedition in high piracy, but he quieted any scruples with the resolve that he would make off merely to New York, if Krutzmacht still lived,

instead of Berlin, and remain there to await further developments.

So, as the Overland Limited rushed across the prairie states, Brainard took counsel with himself, mentally sketching out his every move from the moment when he should step from the train. The readiness with which his mind reached out to this new situation surprised himself; he was already becoming in some way a new person.

The journey itself was a revelation to him and an education. With his Broadway prejudice that the United States stopped somewhere just above the Bronx and behind the Jersey hills, he was astonished to find so much habitable country beyond these horizons and so many people in it who did not seem to depend upon New York City for their livelihood or happiness. At first he was so much preoccupied with his errand and himself in his surprising new rôle that he paid little attention to the scenes spread before his eyes. Chicago impressed him only as a dirtier and more provincial New York. But the next morning when he awoke at Omaha he began to realize that America was more than a strip of land along the Atlantic seaboard, and by the time the train had left Ogden his respect for his fatherland had immensely increased.

He noticed also that the character of the people

on the train was gradually changing. Large, rough-looking men, with tanned faces not too carefully shaved, and sometimes with a queer assortment of jewelry and patent leather shoes took the places of the pallid, smooth shaven business men that had been his companions from Jersey City to Chicago. There were also a number of women traveling alone, large, competent, and not overrefined. Brainard, whose ideas of Americans other than the types to be seen on the streets of New York had been drawn from the travestied figures of the stage, — the miner and the cowboy with flapping sombrero and chaps, — watched these new specimens of his fellow countrymen with keen interest. In spite of their rather uncouth speech and their familiarity with the negro porters, they were attractive. They had a vigorous air about them, indicating that they came from a big country, with big ways of doing things in it, and a broad outlook over wide horizons. The would-be dramatist began to perceive that the world was not peopled wholly by the types that the American stage had made familiar to him.

A little way beyond Ogden the train rolled out into the bright blue inland sea of the Great Salt Lake and trundled on for mile after mile in the midst of the water on a narrow strip of rocky roadbed. Brainard had read in the newspapers

of this famous "Lucin cut-off" where in an effort to save a detour of a few miles around the shore of the lake millions of tons of "fill" had been dumped into an apparently bottomless hole. The pluck and the energy of that road builder who had conceived this work and kept at it month after month, dumping trainloads of rock into a great lake had not specially thrilled him when he read of it. But now the imagination and the courage of the little man who did this sort of thing thrilled him. Harriman, the bold doer of this and greater things, was of course a popular Wall Street hero to the New Yorker, — one of those legendary creatures who were supposed to have their seat of power in the lofty cliffs of that narrow Via Dolorosa and somehow like the alchemists of old conjure great fortunes out of air, with the aid of the "tape." That was the way in which this young man had always thought of Harriman, — "the wizard of railroad finance."

But now as he glided smoothly over the solid roadbed that ran straight westward into the remote distance with the salt waves almost lapping the tracks and leaving a white crust from their spume, with lofty mountains looming to south and to north, — as he stood on the rear platform of the heavy steel train observing this marvelous panorama, — a totally new conception of the renowned

financier came to him. This was not done by watching the tape! It demanded will and force and imagination and faith — spiritual qualities in a man — to do this. The young traveler mentally did homage to the character that had created the wonderful highway over which for a day and a half he had been comfortably borne in luxurious ease.

As he watched the blue mountains about Ogden fade into the haze, it seemed that New York, his life there, and all his conventional conceptions of the little world in which he had vainly struggled for existence also receded and grew smaller, less real. The train in its westward flight was bearing him forward into a new world, within as well as without! As the track began to wind up again to higher levels before taking its next great leap over the Sierras, Brainard went forward to the smoking room, his usual post of observation, where he sat through long, meditative hours, listening to the talk about him and gazing at the fleeting landscape. Whatever else it might mean, — this jaunt across the continent on a stranger's errand, — it was bringing him a rich cargo of new ideas.

Of all his fellow travelers the man who happened to occupy the drawing-room in the car where Brainard had his section aroused his curi-

osity especially. He was one of those well-dressed, alert young business men who had made Brainard conscious of his shabby and inappropriate appearance when he first started on his journey. The door of his room had been closed all the way to Chicago, and Brainard had seen nothing of the man. But since the train left Omaha the door to the drawing-room had been open, and from his section Brainard observed its occupant diligently reading a book. What aroused his attention and interested him in the stranger more than his pleasant appearance of frank good humor had been the sort of book he had chosen for this long journey. It was bound like a "best seller" in a gaudy red cloth, and a picture of a starry-eyed maiden with floating hair adorned the cover. But it was labeled in unmistakable black letters *Paradise Lost*. Brainard, who had made a painful and superficial acquaintance in his youth with this poetic masterpiece, decided that the smartly dressed young American could not be devoting the journey to Milton's epic. It must be that some writer of best sellers had cribbed the great poet's title and fitted it to a less strenuous tale of love and starry-eyed maidens. This theory, however, broke down before the fact that from time to time the young man consulted a small black book that was indubitably a dic-

tionary, and Brainard taking advantage of a moment when the traveler had left his room assured himself that the book was really a copy of Milton's poem set within profane modern covers. Just why this young man should spend his hours on the train reading the puritan epic of heaven and hell puzzled Brainard and whetted his curiosity to know what sort of man the stranger was.

Earlier this morning as the train was climbing down from the Rockies into Utah, an opportunity had come to speak to his fellow traveler. The train had pulled up somewhere before a desolate station whose architect had tried to make a Queen Anne cottage that looked singularly out of place in the bare, wild landscape. While the engine took its long drink, the passengers stretched their legs and enjoyed the crisp mountain air. The stranger came to the vestibule, yawned, and read the name of the station :

"Palisade, is it? . . . The last time I was over this way it looked more lively than this."

"What was happening?" Brainard inquired.

"There was a bunch of miners somewheres in Utah making trouble, on a strike. The company had brought in a couple of carloads of greasers, and the miners were down here shooting up the party."

He got down to the ground, yawned again, and opened a gold cigarette case which he offered to Brainard, — "Have one?"

Brainard took one of the monogrammed cigarettes, and they sauntered together in the sunlight.

"Yes, sir," his new acquaintance continued, "they sure did have a lively time. The greasers were over there on the siding in their cars, and they just let go at 'em with their guns. Now and then they'd hit the station, for fun, you know. I guess maybe you can see the holes yet."

The young man pointed up at some scars among the shingles and a broken window in the upper story. "Sure enough they left their marks!"

"What did they do to 'em?" Brainard asked naively, as they returned to the car when the conductor droned "all aboard."

"Who?" the stranger asked. "The police?"

He waved a hand at the desolate stretch of sage brush backed by grim mountains and laughed. As the train moved off, he added, "Lord, I don't know! They were still popping when my train pulled out. There weren't many greasers fit to work in the mines. What was left after the reception must have walked home — a long ways."

Brainard was somewhat impressed with the

possibilities of a country that could offer such a scrap, *en passant*, so to speak. The stranger invited him into his room and gave him another cigarette.

"From New York?" he inquired. "Not a bad sort of place," he observed tolerantly. "Ever been on the Coast? You've something to see."

"How is San Francisco since the earthquake?" Brainard inquired, thinking to come cautiously and guardedly to the topic of Krutzmacht.

"It's all there and more than ever," the stranger cheerily responded. "You won't find any large cracks," he jested.

"It's queer that you all went straight back to the same ground and built over again."

"Why? It was home, wasn't it? Folks always have a feeling for the place they've lived in, even if it has disadvantages. It's only human!"

Brainard reflected that this was a sentimental point of view he should hardly have expected from the practical sort of man opposite him. In the course of their conversation Brainard inquired about the graft prosecution then in full swing, which had attracted the notice even of eastern papers on account of the highly melodramatic flavor that a picturesque prosecuting attorney had given to the proceedings. The man from San Francisco readily gave his point of view, which

was unfavorable to the virtuous citizens engaged in the task of civic purification. When Brainard asked about the celebrated prosecuting attorney, the stranger looked at him for the first time suspiciously, and said coldly :

“Well, as that gentleman has just been parading up and down the state saying he was going to put me in state prison for the better part of my remaining years, I can’t say I have a high opinion of him.”

“Indeed !” Brainard emitted feebly. The stranger was more mysterious than ever. He did not seem in the least like a candidate for state prison.

“You see,” the young man continued cheerfully, “I’m loose now on about seventy-five thousand dollars of bonds. Time was up in fact day before yesterday, and I’ve been wondering some what they are going to do to my bondsmen. Well, we’ll find out at Ogden when we get the coast papers.”

And when they reached Ogden Brainard ventured to inquire, seeing his new acquaintance deep in the folds of a San Francisco newspaper, — “Well, what did they do to those bondsmen ?”

“Nothing yet, so far as I can see. Oh, hell, it’s all bluff anyway !” and he dropped his newspaper out of the open window. . . .

A man of such cheerful and frank presence, who read *Paradise Lost* (with the aid of a dictionary) and traveled to New York on seventy-five thousand dollars of bail bonds was a curiosity to Brainard. He very much wished to ask him a few impertinent questions in order to satisfy his curiosity, but could not summon sufficient courage, though he felt sure that the agreeable stranger would cheerfully enlighten him.

V

As Brainard entered the smoking compartment of the "club car," he observed that his interesting fellow traveler was in close conversation with a new arrival, who had taken the section opposite Brainard at Ogden. He had already noted this grizzled, thickset person, about sixty years old, who wore a black frock coat, had a large seal ring and a massive Masonic charm. When the newcomer opened his grip to extract a black skull cap, he had seen that the remaining contents of the bag were a mass of papers, a few bits of loose rock, and a bottle of whisky. Whatever toilet articles the traveler carried were carefully concealed.

Already the oldish, grizzled traveler with the skull cap was at home, the center of a little group of men at one of the card tables, — a bottle of beer in front of him, a cigar tilted at an angle between his teeth. He was conversing with that perfect naturalness and freedom that Brainard had observed was the custom in this large country, even among complete strangers.

"Yes, sir," he was saying, "I came back from

Alaska in 1907 broke, — that is, what you might call broke, — a couple of thousand dollars all I had in the world. I said to my wife, ‘I’m done with mines! For good. I’ve spent the better part of thirty years chasing gold, and there may be money to be got out of the ground, but it ain’t for me.’ And would you believe it? The next morning I was starting for Union! Met a man I knew at the hotel in Seattle and he showed me some samples of the ore they were taking out there. And I started. The old woman too. Been there ever since!” He paused as if to let the others say “Kismet!” and repeated, — “Been there ever since, working the next claim. My wife died six months ago, and I got lonely and thought I’d come out and see what had happened to Frisco since the quake.”

From this point the talk drifted on erratically as the train rushed towards the Sierras. The agreeable young man who read *Paradise Lost* and was under bonds to justice seemed to have an extensive acquaintance in common with the grizzled miner. They discussed some Scotchman who had been mining but now owned an oil well in the “Midway field” that was reputed to be bringing in five thousand dollars a day. Another of their friends — an Englishman — had a silver “proposition” in Mexico. There was also Jimmie

Birt who owned a string of horses and had sunk a fortune in a mine in British Columbia, but Jimmie, it seemed, was making good in Oregon timber land. So it went with one adventurer after another, roaming this side of the continent, now penniless, to-morrow with millions, restlessly darting from subarctic Alaska to subtropical Mexico along the coast or the mountain spine of the continent. They sought gold and silver and copper, oil and wood and cattle, water-power, wheat, and wine, — it made little odds what. Everything was a "big proposition" in which to make or lose. Brainard drank in the varied biography of this company of adventurers, his brain fired with the excitements of their risks. Krutzmacht, it seemed to him, must have been such a one as these. He was on the point of asking the old miner, who was the principal talker, if he had ever heard of Krutzmacht, when his ears caught the words:

"I see by to-day's San Francisco paper that a receivership has been asked for the Shasta companies. That means they've got Krutzmacht, don't it?"

"I expect so — he's been on the edge some time from what I hear," the younger man replied.

"So they got him. . . . I thought Herb would make good — he was a nervy Dutchman, if there

ever was one! But he couldn't go up against that crowd."

"When he began building his road through the mountains to the Bay, the S. P. crowd went for him and shut off his credit. You've got to get permission to do some things in California."

"I'm told he'd built up a big property."

"That's right — if he'd been able to hold on, there would have been millions, what with the power company, the timber, the railroad, and the land. That's why the S. P. people wanted it! They waited, and when the panic came on, they began squeezing him. I saw him in New York a few days ago. I suppose he was trying to get money from some of those big Jew bankers where he'd got it before. But it isn't the right time to pass the hat in Wall Street just now."

The talk ran on desultorily about "the S. P. crowd," who it seemed were the financial dictators of the Pacific Coast and "the nerve of the Dutchman who went up against that bunch." Brainard listened closely to every word, but refrained from asking questions for fear of betraying an undue interest in Krutzmacht. As far as he could make out, with his inexperience in business affairs, Krutzmacht's companies were valuable and solvent, but he himself was embarrassed, as many men of large enterprises were at this time, and his

enemies had taken this opportune moment to get possession of his properties, using for that purpose the courts of which they seemed to have control as they had of the legislature and the governor.

"It's a shame," the younger stranger remarked frankly; "I expect they'll put him through the mill and take every dollar he owns."

"They'll eat the hide off him all right!"

"Well, well," the miner sighed in conclusion. "So Herb's lost out! He's a nervy one, though, obstinate as a mule. Wouldn't surprise me if he crawled through somehow. I remember him years ago when he had a mine down in Arizona, a big low-grade copper proposition. That was in nineteen four, no, — three. It was another of those big schemes, too big for any one man, — a railroad and a smelter besides the mine. He claimed there was a fortune in it — and I guess it was so — only he was forced to shut down, and the next I heard of him he was out here on the Coast in this Shasta proposition."

And that was all they had to say about Krutzmacht.

VI

"Do you know who that man is?" Brainard asked the old miner as the gentleman under bonds to return to California strolled out of the smoking room.

"Why, that's Eddie Hollinger."

"And who is Mr. Hollinger?"

"Say, young feller, don't you ever read the papers where you live? Why, he's the boss of the prize ring business here on the Coast, — the 'fight trust,' as they call it. Made lots of money. Mighty fine feller Ed is, too. He's having his troubles these days the same as the rest of us. They're trying him for bribery, you know."

After he had delivered himself of an impassioned defense of the "business men who were being hounded by a lot of hypocrites," Brainard led him back to Krutzmacht, or as the miner preferred to call him, "that nervy Dutchman." But beyond elaborating the story of his own personal encounter with the German a number of years before somewhere in Arizona, the miner could add little to what had already been told. The German was a daring and adventurous man,

who had been "known on the Coast" for thirty years or more, — always involved in some large financial venture in which he had been backed by capital from his native land. "But it's up and down with all of us," he sighed in conclusion and drifted on to tell his own story. He talked with the volubility and hopefulness of youth. When he said that he hadn't seen a white man in six months except the dozen "dagoes" working his claim, his volubility seemed to Brainard excusable. It was less easy to explain his hopeful mood, for it appeared that he had knocked about the mountain states for the better part of a lifetime with scarcely more to show for his efforts than what was contained in his lean bag. But the roll of blue prints of his claim, with the little bag of specimen ore, was in his eyes a sure guarantee of fortune.

"You'd oughter see my mine, — the Rosy Lee I call it because that was my wife's name. It's a winner sure! I'm expecting they'll break into the vein every blast. May get a wire in Frisco that they're in, and then you bet I'll go whooping back to pick up the dollars! The Union, next door to me, so to speak, got some ore that ran forty thousand to the ton — they've taken out four millions already."

He rambled on about "shoots," "winzes,"

"stopes," "faults," and geological formation until he had thoroughly fired the young man's imagination with the fascinating lure of the search for "metal." They examined the specimens in the old miner's bag and talked far into the night while the train panted up the steep grades and the moonlight lay white on the snowdrifts of the mountains outside.

"Come back with me, young feller," the miner said in his simple, expansive manner, "and I'll show you some life you've never seen! . . . It's kind of lonesome up there now the old woman's gone. . . . You'll make money."

"I'd like to," Brainard responded warmly. "Nothing better! Perhaps I will some day, but I can't this trip."

"Come soon," the old fellow urged, "or you'll find me at the Waldorf in your own town."

Brainard lay awake in his berth long afterwards, listening to the laboring locomotives as they pulled the heavy train over the mountains, rushed through the snowsheds, and emerged occasionally to give glimpses of steep, snowy hillsides. The rarefied air of the lofty altitude had set his pulses humming. So much it seemed had happened to him already since he stepped aboard the train in Jersey City that he could hardly

realize himself. The "boss of the fight trust" and the cheerful miner who had "lost the old woman six months back" and still had faith after a lifetime of disappointments that he would dig a fortune from that "hole up in them hills," were real experiences to the young man. The simple, natural, human quality of these strangers appealed to him. "It must be the west," he generalized easily. "I suppose Krutzmacht is the same sort, — large-hearted, simple, a good gambler." But the man who had signed his name between convulsions, — H. KRUTZMACHT, — didn't seem to fit the same genial frame. He was of sterner stuff. "Anyway he's given me one fine time and I'll do what I can for him out there!" It was useless to speculate further as to what awaited him in San Francisco. It might be that court proceedings having already begun, the affair would be taken out of his hands completely. He might find a telegram from Krutzmacht countermanding his orders.

At last he dropped to sleep, buoyant and eager for that unknown future that lay before him, while the train having surmounted the last mountain barrier wound slowly down into the green, fruit-covered valleys of California.

VII

THE Overland was several hours late; it was nearly four o'clock of a foggy April afternoon before Brainard emerged from the ferry station with his big valise in his hand. His first intention had been to go to a hotel and there deposit his bag and make inquiries. The miner had urged him to accompany him to the old "Palace." "They say it's finer than ever since the quake." But Brainard, reflecting that it was Saturday afternoon and considering that a few hours' delay might mean the loss of two days, shook hands with his fellow travelers and turned to the telephone booths to discover Krutzmacht's city address. When he had memorized the street and number he started up Market Street, still carrying his bag. He was astonished to see how thoroughly the city had recovered from its disaster in little more than a year. There were large gaps in the business blocks, to be sure, but it was a lively, substantial city with a great deal of building going forward, especially in the noisy erection of tall steel buildings. The very sight of these ambitious structures inspired courage!

After a short walk Brainard found himself at the entrance of a large, new building on Sutter Street that corresponded with the number he had memorized. He stood on the curb for a few moments staring up at the windows. Now that he had reached his goal, a trace of his former habit of despondency came over him, making him hesitate before the final effort, but shaking himself free from the old morbidness he walked briskly into the building. When he emerged from the elevator on the top floor, the boy pointed down the corridor. "The last one on the right," he said.

Brainard passed a number of offices whose doors bore in small black letters the names of different companies, — "Pacific Northern Railroad," "Great Western Land and Improvement Company," "The Shasta Corporation." At the extreme end of the corridor was a door with the simple lettering, "Herbert Krutzmacht." The plain black letters of the name had something of the same potency that the signature at the bottom of the power of attorney had. Like that, like the sick man himself who had painfully gasped out his last orders, they were a part of the substantial realm of fact. So far, at least, the dream held! There was a real man named Krutzmacht, engaged in important business enterprises, and

from what Brainard had learned on the train he knew that there was a crisis in his affairs.

With his hand on the door-handle he paused. His heart beat fast, and he looked around him nervously as if expecting to see an officer of the court lurking somewhere in the corridor. There was no one on this floor, however. The quiet of a late Saturday afternoon had settled down on the busy building, but within the private office Brainard could hear the slow click of a typewriter. He pushed open the door and entered.

It was a large, rather barely furnished room, evidently used as an ante-room to other offices. Near the window a young woman was seated at a desk, lazily examining a mass of papers and occasionally tapping the keys of a machine, with the desultory air of an employee killing time at the end of the day. She was a distinctly good looking woman, Brainard observed, although no longer young, with abundant coarse black hair, fresh complexion, and decidedly plump.

The stenographer looked up from her work at Brainard with a start as if she had been expecting some one, but quickly composed herself.

"Well, what is it?" she asked with a peculiar intonation that indicated hostility.

Brainard was at a loss for a reply and stood gaping at the stenographer foolishly. He had

not thought of meeting a woman. He had known few women, and he lacked confidence in dealing with them.

"Is — is Mr. Krutzmacht in?" he stammered awkwardly, and cursed himself for the silly question.

The woman gave him a suspicious look and answered shortly:

"No, he ain't."

"Oh," the young man remarked, looking about the office. Near the stenographer's desk was a door partly open, which led into an inner room. In the farther corner of this room could be seen the projecting corner of a steel safe. This Brainard felt must be his goal, and he unconsciously stepped toward the door of the inner office. The woman rose as if to bar his further progress and snapped irritably:

"What do you want here?"

"Why, I just want to talk to you," he replied as amiably as he could.

"Cut it short then, young man. I haven't any time to waste in conversazione."

"You don't seem very busy!" Brainard observed smiling.

"I'm always busy to strangers, little one — I do my day-dreaming outside of office hours." She thrust the metal cover on her machine with a clatter. "See?"

"Oh, yes, I see," Brainard replied and again tried to approach the inner office. The stenographer confronted him alertly and folding her arms demanded :

"What's your game, anyway, young man? If you're one of those lawyers —"

"No, I'm no lawyer," Brainard said laughing. "Guess again!"

"Haven't the time. It's Saturday afternoon, and this office is supposed to be closed at one o'clock."

"So it is Saturday — I'd almost forgotten the fact."

The stenographer eyed him very sourly and observed coldly :

"Where do you keep yourself that you don't know the day of the week? Go home, young man, and think it over."

Brainard saw that in this national game of "josh" he could make no progress against such an adept and came bluntly to the point :

"Are you in charge of Mr. Krutzmacht's office?"

"What's that to you?"

"Because I've been sent here by Mr. Krutzmacht to —"

"Sent here by Mr. Krutzmacht — the one you were asking for just now? . . . Try something else, sonny."

Brainard felt foolish and completely baffled. He wanted to strangle the woman and throw her out of the window. But aside from the fact that she appeared to be vigorous and of a fighting disposition he realized that the less disturbance he made the greater chance he would have of carrying through his mission successfully. It is not clear what the outcome between the two would have been, if at that moment there had not appeared from the inner office an elderly man whose mild face had a worried look. Brainard noted the man's near-sighted, timid air and regained his calm.

"Here's a young feller, Mr. Peters, who says he's looking for Mr. Krutzmacht," the girl said.

"Mr. Krutzmacht is not in the city," the man said nervously.

"Yes, I know that!" Brainard replied easily. "You see I was sent here by Mr. Krutzmacht himself."

"You come from Krutzmacht!" the man gasped in excitement, while the woman's face expressed incredulity. "Where is he? We've been telegraphing all over the country the last week trying to locate him. Mr. Snell has just gone east — left this office only an hour ago — to see if he can find him."

Brainard reflected that the Overland Limited had probably served him a good turn by being

late; for he judged that the fewer persons he had to deal with in the present emergency the easier it would be for him to accomplish his purposes. This mild-mannered, flustered clerk did not look formidable. His tones gained confidence.

"Mr. Krutzmacht," Brainard explained glibly, "has met with an accident — not a serious one, I hope. He is in good hands. He has sent me out here to get some papers that he wants from his safe."

"But, but," the bewildered clerk stammered, "don't you know that the court —"

"They've fixed up a receivership, I know," Brainard interrupted, "that's the reason perhaps —"

"I've been expecting 'em in here all the afternoon," the clerk said nervously, looking at the door. "Then there'll be the devil to pay generally."

"All the better!" Brainard exclaimed. "Let's get busy before they arrive."

"But who are you, anyway?" the old man demanded with a sudden access of caution.

Brainard merely smiled at the worried old man. He was more and more at his ease, now that he knew the caliber of the timid old clerk, and though he felt the necessity of haste in his operations, if an officer of the court was momentarily expected

to make a descent upon Krutzmacht's private office, yet he spoke and acted with calm.

"Suppose we lock these outer doors — if you think any one is likely to interrupt us — and then we can proceed undisturbed."

He shot the brass bolt in the door through which he had entered and glanced into the inner office, but apparently this one had no exit upon the corridor. Meanwhile the stenographer was whispering vehemently to the old clerk, who looked at the intruder doubtfully and seemed irresolute. Brainard leisurely pulled down the shade over the glass window in the door.

"There!" he said. "Now we are ready."

He took the sheet that bore Krutzmacht's signature from his pocket and held it out to Peters. "Want my credentials? That's a power of attorney Mr. Krutzmacht dictated and signed just before I left him."

He waited for the clerk to adjust his glasses and read the hastily penned sheet, thinking what he should do if by chance the old man refused to recognize it. He did not feel disturbed. The ride across the continent had rested him bodily and mentally. The good meals and the unwonted luxury of eating and sleeping without care, which had been his daily companion for all the years he could remember, had given

him a fresh spirit. He could think quickly and with precision; he felt himself amply capable, full of power to meet any emergency that might rise — for the first time in his life.

“What do you want to do?” Peters asked, handing back the power of attorney. He seemed somewhat reassured by the sight of his master’s signature at the bottom of the scrawl.

“Mr. Krutzmacht wanted me to get the stuff out of his safe — I suppose it’s the one in there?”

“But — but,” the clerk protested. “If the court has granted this injunction, I don’t suppose I ought to —”

“That’s just why you ought!” Brainard interrupted impatiently. “Don’t you see this is Krutzmacht’s one chance of getting his property out of their reach? Once the court puts hands on it, there won’t be much left for the owner!”

Without further delay he strode into the inner office, saying lightly:

“Krutzmacht is keeping out of sight for the present — until trouble blows over, you see.”

“The safe’s locked,” the clerk objected weakly, “and no one here has the combination. Mr. Snell didn’t leave it.”

Without taking the trouble to reply, Brainard walked over to the heavy steel door and began twirling the knob as if he had opened office safes.

all his life. The clerk and the stenographer stared while the little nickel wheel revolved in Brainard's fingers. When finally the bolts shot back and the door swung open, Peters gasped:

"But how will you get all that stuff out of here?"

"Just bring me that bag from the other room, will you please?" Brainard asked the stenographer. As she turned unwillingly to fetch the bag, there came a loud, resolute knock at the door of the outer office.

"There!" the old clerk exclaimed.

The stenographer started for the door, but Brainard with one leap overtook her, pushed her back into the inner room, and closed the door. Again the knocking on the outside door came, even more insistently, and the knob was rattled as if the visitor was determined to gain entrance. The three in the inner office stood still listening, not speaking. Brainard noticed an angry red flush spread over the woman's features. As no further knocking came after a few moments, Brainard turned to the stenographer sternly.

"You can sit at that desk, miss. I'll answer the door. Come on, Mr. Peters, and show me the most important things in here — the papers Krutzmacht's enemies would hate to lose. You know them, don't you?"

"Some of them," the clerk admitted, rather doubtfully, his eyes running over the close-packed shelves of the vault. "They're 'most all valuable in here, I suppose. The general papers are kept in the other vault downstairs. But the most important are in these drawers."

He pulled out several receptacles that seemed crammed with engraved certificates and legal papers.

"Mr. Krutzmacht kept all his personal papers up here where he could get at them day or night," he explained. "I guess it's all valuable to some one!" he concluded hopelessly.

"I can't put it all in that bag," Brainard observed, his eye running over the contents of the well-filled vault. "Well, let's try the drawers first — the cream is likely to be there."

He began to pass out the contents of the drawers to the clerk, who shoved them hastily into the large valise. But before Brainard had quite finished the second tier of drawers, the bag was almost filled with crisp, tightly packed bundles of securities and legal papers. There remained books and other rows of documents. Brainard looked at some of them impatiently, trying to decide what could best be left behind. At last he exclaimed:

"It's no use my trying to pick it over. I

might leave the best of the lot. I must have a small trunk. Can you get me one, Peters? While you are gone I will fetch it all out here and sort it over. . . . No, don't go out that way!" he exclaimed, as the clerk started for the outer door. "Where does that go?" He pointed to a small door behind the corner of the safe.

"It's the fire escape," Peters explained timidly.

"Just the thing!"

He opened the door and peered out into the dark, inclosed well down which ran one of the modern circular fire escapes.

Brainard handed Peters a bill, and shoved him toward the door. After the clerk had gone, Brainard turned to his task, and emptied the safe in a few minutes. Then he began to sort the books and papers and securities into piles for convenient packing, stuffing the bonds and stocks, which he judged to be the most valuable part of the loot, into his valise.

There had been no movement by the stenographer for some time, and Brainard had almost forgotten her presence. Suddenly, while he was in the safe, he heard a slight sound outside, like the movement of a woman's dress. He jumped to his feet. The stenographer, with one hand on the desk telephone, was about to take off the receiver.

"Put that down!" Brainard ordered, and added more gently, "What are you telephoning for?"

"Just going to call up a friend," the woman replied pertly, and started to take the receiver off the hook again.

Brainard cleared the intervening space in a bound, and snatched the instrument from the woman's hand.

"You'll have to wait a while to talk to your friend!"

"What are you doing here, anyway?" she asked angrily.

"You can see — packing up some papers. You might give me a hand."

"Say," she replied without moving, "I don't believe that yarn you told old Peters."

"Oh, you don't?"

"Not for one minute!"

"Well, what will you do about it?"

The girl tapped sullenly with her foot, without replying.

"Want to let that friend of yours know about me?" Brainard continued meaningly. As the stenographer tossed her head and moved again toward the telephone, he added, "Come over here where I can watch you! Quick now, pack those bundles into the bag." As she still hesitated, defying

him, he said sharply, "Get down on your knees and go to work!"

She whimpered, but fell to her knees. They worked silently for several minutes. The vault was stripped bare. The smaller papers were packed into the bag, and the bulkier stuff was stacked on the floor, ready to be thrust into another receptacle.

Brainard glanced at his watch. Peters had been gone more than a quarter of an hour. Had he been detained, or had he become suspicious and decided to get advice before going any farther? Brainard considered departing with what he had already packed in his bag, which he judged was the more important part of the safe's contents.

"I guess it's about time for me to be going home now," the stenographer remarked, plucking up her courage. "I'll leave you and Mr. Peters to lock up."

"You want to see that friend badly, don't you?" Brainard asked. "Not quite yet; the day's work is not over yet. Be patient!"

He did not dare to trust her beyond his sight, nor did he think it wise to leave her behind him. The girl walked idly to the window, then edged along the wall. Beside the safe there was a recess, from which the rear door opened. When

the stenographer reached this, she darted for the door.

"Good-by!" she called. "I guess the police will take care of you!"

The little door fortunately stuck. Before she could open it, Brainard had dragged her back into the room.

"You're just a common second-story man!" she cried angrily.

"Exactly! How clever of you to penetrate my disguise! I'm a car-barn bandit — Texas Joe — anything you please! But before you skip, I want you to look through those drawers in the vault, to see if I have missed anything."

He shoved the surprised woman into the empty vault, and swung the door. As the bolts shot back into place, a muffled cry escaped from within. Brainard called back:

"Save your breath! There's enough air in there to keep you alive for some hours; and I'll see that you get out in plenty of time to join that friend for dinner. Just keep quiet and save your breath!"

A sob answered him from the vault.

VIII

At that moment a low, confidential knock came on the door of the outer office, followed by a discreet rattling of the knob.

"There he is at last!" thought Brainard, with a sense of relief.

He hurried to unbolt the door; but instead of Peters's mild face, a chubby, spectacled young fellow, wearing his derby hat pushed far back on a round, bald head, confronted him.

"Who are you?" Brainard demanded, trying to close the door.

The man grinned back:

"And who are *you*?"

He had shoved his right leg into the opening, and with his question he gave a powerful push that almost knocked Brainard from his feet.

"Well?" he said, once within the office, grinning more broadly. "I'm Farson — Edward, Jr. — from the *Despatch*. We just had a wire from New York that Krutzmacht's been found, dead!"

"Dead!" Brainard exclaimed.

"Had a stroke or something, and died this

morning in a hospital. One of our old men down East got on to it, and tipped us the wire."

The intruder settled himself comfortably on the top of the stenographer's little desk, and drew out a cigarette. Dangling his fat legs, he eyed Brainard with an amused stare.

The latter stood for the moment dumfounded. Although he had at first looked for this outcome, as the days had gone by he had come to believe that the old man was recovering. Now he realized swiftly that with Krutzmacht dead his power of attorney was no better than a piece of blank paper. His position was doubly tenuous.

"Say!" The reporter interrupted his meditation in a burst of cynical confidence. "The old man was a good pirate — fought to the last ditch, and then got out."

"What makes you think he got out?" Brainard inquired.

The reporter shrugged his shoulders.

"They had him, and he must have known it. That railroad crowd would have taken the hide off him, and put what was left in the penitentiary."

"Perhaps they made away with him," Brainard suggested meaningly.

"You think so? My, that would be a fat scoop! What makes you think so?"

Brainard raised his eyebrows mysteriously,

and the reporter nimbly filled in a reasonable outline of the story.

"You mean he got the money down East that he needed to stop this receivership, and they knew it, and put him out of the way, so that he shouldn't interrupt the game?"

"Possibly," Brainard admitted.

The reporter jumped from his seat briskly.

"Well, I must get busy — they're holding the paper for me. Who's in charge here?"

"I am," Brainard replied promptly.

"And what's your name?"

He pulled a dirty note book from his hip-pocket.

"Wilkins," Brainard answered quickly, "of Wilkins & Starbird, Mr. Krutzmacht's New York attorneys."

The reporter looked at Brainard and whistled, but he wrote down the name.

"You folks didn't lose any time in getting busy! I s'pose there'll be litigation and all that. Do you expect to save much from the wreck?"

"That's what I am here for — to keep those pirates from making off with the stuff!" His eye fell upon his valise, and a sudden resolution came to him. "See here, Farson," he said confidentially, laying a hand on the reporter's pudgy thigh, "do you see that bag? The Pacific North-

ern that they're after and the Shasta Company are right inside that bag, together with a lot of other valuable property. I'm going to take it where those pirates can't lay a finger on it, in spite of all the courts in California!"

The reporter's eyes grew round.

"You've got your nerve!" he said admiringly.

"You see, time's money — big money. So I can't stay here all night gassing with you. There is a train on the Santa Fé at ten, isn't there?"

"Ten ten," the reporter corrected.

"I must make that train, or —"

"Lose the trick?" the reporter suggested affably.

"I'm going to make it!"

"You'll need some help in the get-away, I suppose?"

"Just so! If I make that train all right with this stuff, there'll be a couple of hundred dollars for you, my boy; and what's more, you can have the story all to yourself. It will be better than the old man's death."

A pleasant smile circled around the reporter's chubby face.

"All right, Mr. Wilkins! What do you want now?"

"I've sent out for another bag," Brainard

explained. "I'll just pass the rest of these papers out to you, and you can stack them ready to pack when the bag comes."

Brainard opened the inner door and listened. There were faint sounds like sobbing within the safe.

"If she can cry, she'll last," he said to himself. "Now for it! Where in thunder can that fellow Peters be? I hope he hasn't heard that the old man is dead!"

He began to shove the books and papers through the door, which he kept nearly closed, for fear that the reporter might detect the sounds that came from the safe, and ask questions. It was dark now, but he did not dare to turn on the electric lights, for the windows faced the street, and he feared men might already be watching the office.

He had transferred all the packages not packed, and was struggling at his heavy valise, when he heard a voice behind him, and started.

"I guess you thought I was never coming back," Peters stammered breathlessly. He was dragging a small trunk through the little back door behind the safe. "It nearly broke my back getting this thing up those five flights of stairs."

"Bring it this way, Peters!" Brainard shouted nervously, pushing the old man through the door into the outer office.

He banged the door shut just as a muffled scream issued from the safe.

"What's that?" Peters asked, dropping the trunk to the floor.

"Somebody in the hall, I suppose," Brainard replied coolly.

Fortunately the old man's attention was distracted from the scream by the sight of the reporter. Farson had lighted another cigarette, and was swinging his legs and smiling amiably.

"Didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"Who —"

"That's all right. Your friend here seems to be in a hurry. He asked me to stay and help in the spring moving."

"Come, get to work!" Brainard called out, on his knees before the trunk. "Cigars and explanations afterward!"

They slung the books and the packages of papers, which the reporter had neatly arranged, into the little trunk. Then they closed and locked it. Brainard unbolted the outer door.

"I wouldn't make my exit by the front door," the reporter advised. "I reckon you'd be spotted before you got to the street. There's a back way, ain't there?"

Brainard, thinking of the woman in the safe, hesitated.

"That's how I brought up the trunk," Peters said. "There's nobody out there."

Brainard opened the door to the inner office, and listened. It was quite still. Probably the woman had fainted.

"Come on!" he called, grasping one end of the trunk.

The reporter caught hold of the other, and Peters followed, tugging at the heavy bag. As they crossed the inner office, there was not a sound.

Brainard hesitated at the door, thinking that he must release the girl before he left; but as he stood before the safe, there was a squeal from within which indicated sufficient liveliness on the part of the stenographer. There would be time enough to attend to her after he had got his loot to the street. If she were released now, her temper might prove to be troublesome; so he joined the others on the landing, closing the little door behind him.

"The old man used to get out this way sometimes," Peters observed.

"I reckon he never will again," the reporter laughed.

The hall opened on a narrow, circular iron staircase, without a single light. Down this pit Brainard and the reporter plunged, tugging at

the trunk, which threatened to stick at every turn. The old man got on more easily with the bag, which he merely allowed to slide after him. Brainard was soaked in perspiration; the reporter puffed and swore, but he stuck manfully at his job.

At last they tumbled out into the dark alley at the rear of the building. After he had caught his breath, Brainard inquired where he could find a cab.

"If I were you, young man," the reporter replied, "I wouldn't try being a swell. I'd take the first rig I could charter. There's one over there now."

He pointed down the alley, and waded off into the dark. Presently he returned with a plumber's wagon.

"He says he'll land your baggage at the ferry for four bits. You can ride or walk behind, just as you like."

They loaded the trunk and the bag into the wagon, and the reporter, perching himself beside the driver, announced genially:

"I'll see you aboard!"

"How much time is there left?" Brainard asked.

"Thirty-two minutes — you can do it easily in twenty-five."

"Wait a minute, then !"

Brainard took Peters to one side, and said to him in a low voice :

"You remember that noise you heard up there in the office? It came from the girl — the stenographer. She got fresh while you were out, and I had to lock her up in the safe to keep her quiet. I think there is enough air to last her some time yet; but her last squeal was rather faint. Suppose you run up and let her out !"

Peters, with a scared look on his face, made one bound for the stairs.

"Hold on, man !" Brainard shouted after him. "You don't know the combination. Here it is !"

He searched in his pockets for the slip of paper on which he had copied the figures, but in the dark he could not find it.

"This ain't any automobile," the reporter suggested. "You'd better put off your good-bys until the next time !"

"Try to remember what I say," Brainard said to the frightened Peters, and began repeating the combination from memory. "I'm pretty sure that's right. Say it over ! There, again !"

The shaking man repeated the figures three or four times.

"Good ! Keep saying it over to yourself as

you go upstairs, and I'll telephone the office from the ferry and see if you've got her out."

But Peters had already disappeared into the darkness within the building. Brainard climbed into the plumber's wagon, the man whipped up his horse, and they jolted out of the alley. As they came in sight of the ferry building, the reporter compared his watch with the clock, and remarked :

"Eight minutes to the good — fast traveling for a plumber !"

"Just look out for my stuff while I telephone !"
Brainard exclaimed.

All the way to the ferry he had been anxious about the girl in the safe. He had already resolved that if he found Peters had failed to open the safe, he would go back and run the risk of capture.

When the operator rang up the number of Krutzmacht's private office, there was an agonizing wait before any one answered. Finally a woman's voice, very faint, called :

"Who is it ?"

Prudence counseled Brainard to assume that the voice was that of the stenographer, and to hang up the receiver. But he wished to make sure that it was the woman herself, and so he asked :

"Are you feeling all right, miss?"

"You thief!" came hissing over the wire to his ear. "You won't get —" And there was no more.

She had dropped the receiver, probably for action. When Brainard stepped from the telephone booth, he looked uneasily in the direction of Market Street, as if he expected to see the stenographer flying through the hurrying crowd. The reporter beckoned to him.

"Your trunk has gone aboard the ferry. Here's the check — to Chicago. I thought you'd rather tote this bag yourself, though it's pretty heavy."

"Much obliged for all your trouble," Brainard replied warmly. "And now for you!"

He pulled his roll of currency from his pocket, and handed five hundred-dollar bills to the reporter.

"You earned it! I never should have got away in time without you."

"I guess that's so. Much obliged for the dough; but the scoop alone is worth it. What a story! A light-fingered attorney from New York blowing in here under the court's nose and lifting the whole Pacific Northern, and goodness knows what else besides, clean out of the State! Some folks who think they know how to do things will be sick to-morrow morning when they get the *Despatch*!"

He shoved the bills into his trousers pocket and pulled out another cigarette.

"There's the gong!" he remarked.

"Thanks!" Brainard said warmly, shaking the reporter's fat hand. "I'll want to see your story. Send it to me!"

"And say, I'd make up a better yarn than that lawyer story, when you have time."

"So you didn't believe me?"

"I guess I'm no cub reporter!" the *Despatch* man laughed complacently, as the ferry-boat began to move out of the slip.

Then he started on a run for the nearest telephone booth.

"If that girl means business, as I think she does, I shan't get as far as Chicago!" Brainard muttered to himself, turning into the cabin of the ferry-boat.

IX

WHEN Brainard awoke the next morning the train was moving through the Mojave desert. He lay for some time in his berth trying to collect himself and realize all that had brought him thither. It was intensely hot in the narrow compartment that he had taken, and when he raised the window curtains the sunlight reflected from the desert was blinding. As he drew down the curtain, his eyes fell upon the large bag beside him, and with a start the adventure of the previous day came over him. He laughed aloud as he recalled the different scenes in Krutzmacht's office, — the stenographer's suspicious reception, the endless bumping down the circular iron stairs with the bag and the valise, old Peters's horrified face when he learned that the woman had been shut in the safe. Indeed, the entire week since he ran across the dying stranger at the door of his lodging seemed like a dream, peopled with faces and scenes that were extraordinarily vivid and of a kind he had never known in his narrow, sordid life. With a luxurious sense of new possession he went over all the little details of his journey

across the continent. The week, he recognized, had been a liberal education to his mentally starved self.

But what was he going to do now?

Hitherto he had been carried along easily on a wave of events that demanded instant action, and he had not worried about the future. Even when the reporter had given him the news of Krutzmacht's death in the hospital he was already too deep in the affair to stop, although he realized that the crude power of attorney, which had been his sole legal protection in looting the safe, had lost all its force the instant its maker ceased to breathe. After that, he was, as the stenographer had said, — merely a burglar. Yet he had not hesitated to obey the dead man's will rather than the law. But now?

Thus far he had been executing Krutzmacht's direct orders, with an unconscious sense of a living personality guiding him, taking the real responsibility for his deeds. The stranger who had been stricken near his door had seized upon him as the nearest available tool, had imposed on him his will, and had sent him hurrying across the continent on an errand the full nature of which was even yet a mystery to Brainard. And he had obeyed the dying stranger with a curious faith in his reasonableness, — had responded to him pliantly as to the command of a natural

master. But now that this master was dead, the situation was altogether different. Should he still attempt to execute his scarcely intelligible wishes?

He had learned enough about Krutzmacht these last few days to understand that the old man had been engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the control of large properties, — one of those peculiarly modern duels fought with bankers' credits and court decrees. Apparently his enemies, more powerful than he — at least with larger resources at their command — had been closing in on him for the final grapple, which threatened utterly to ruin him. He had gone to New York to raise the funds with which to evade impending bankruptcy and loss of control of the properties which he had created. Brainard now fully believed that Krutzmacht had succeeded in this, and that he had been stricken at last by the hand of a hired thug and thrown on the street to die. But even in the torture of his final convulsions the old man had exerted his powerful will to defeat these cowardly foes, and had lingered on in life just long enough to enable his agent to snatch the prey from their jaws.

What now was he to do with this bag of documents and securities that lay there, its fat sides bulging in proof of his deed? The obvious thing

would be to seek the nearest federal authority, deposit his plunder, and allow an impartial court to settle the dispute between the dead man and his enemies. A week before, such a timid and safe course of conduct would have seemed to Brainard the only possible action to take. Now he found it not in the least to his taste, and dismissed it without further consideration. He had become an altogether different person, even in this week, from that beaten man who had stumbled homeward from a petty defeat through the New York streets in the gloom of an April day. For this one brief week in all the years he could remember he had been alive — fully alive — and with his hand now in the thick of this vital web he was not willing to withdraw. The one who had used him as a tool was dead, but his strong will lived on in him, not yet fulfilled, and to that strong will whose only hope of fulfillment lay in him — the chance stranger — a new sense of loyalty responded. He would not desert the old man in the present crisis, no matter what the merely legal aspects of his situation were. Already the stranger's will like fertile seed was germinating within this fresh soil.

"Take everything," Krutzmacht said. "Take it all to Berlin." That he would do if he could.

But then what?

There was a strange name — Mell or Melody — that the dying man had been at such pains to enunciate. What had Melody to do with the matter? Was it the name of a person? Or an institution? He exercised all his ingenuity in trying to invent a reasonable explanation of this one word. Possibly Krutzmacht had tried to pronounce Mendel or Mendelssohn. Brainard thought there was a firm of German bankers with some such name. Light on the puzzle might be found in the contents of his bag, but at present he did not like to open it. At any rate Berlin must be his next destination.

He pondered all these things at his late breakfast, where in the close-shaded car electric fans buzzed to make a semblance of moving air. The fellow travelers on this train — returning tourists from Southern California resorts — did not interest him as had the varied company on the Overland, and he shut himself up in his compartment with his secret, not even leaving it for luncheon. It seemed that already the cares of property — even of another, unknown person's property — were beginning to separate him from his fellows, rendering him less eager to make acquaintances, more suspicious than he was by nature. In the present circumstances he preferred

to keep to himself. So all that long day, alone in his hot room, he thought, while the train slowly traversed the mighty Arizona plains, arid, limitless, austere, broken here and there by solitary rocky peaks that rose majestically out of the desert into the still, clear atmosphere. It was a stranger land than he had ever dreamed, outside all the world that he knew, remote, mysterious, calm.

He did not open the bag for fear of possible interruption. He thought, and as the hot day wore on into the afternoon he began to lose that sense of security he had had when he caught the train in San Francisco. The burden of the bag became heavier. If he were any judge of newspaper men, that reporter Farson had by this time spread the story of his deeds broadcast over the civilized world. Messages might be speeding past him even now on the wires, directions to intercept his flight at some convenient point farther to the east. He first planned to make for New Orleans as a port of departure for Europe, having altogether abandoned the idea of returning to New York, which probably was the one most dangerous spot for him on the globe. Even New Orleans seemed a desperately long way off. The sooner, he reasoned, he could put an international boundary between himself and Krutzmacht's

enemies, the better would be his chance of reaching Berlin with his plunder.

He examined the crude map in the railroad folder and made out that by the next noon, if the train were on time, he could make connections at Albuquerque in New Mexico with a train for El Paso. To-morrow noon seemed far off, but he concluded that it was the best he could do. Until then he should have to run his chances, and possess himself with patience. The day drew slowly to its conclusion. The sun streamed more horizontally across the arid plain, touching the distant mountains with blood-red tints. A desolate, man-forsaken country! For miles and miles there was not a living being, not a habitation in sight from the railroad. Somewhere far off beyond those purpling mountains lay the romantic land of Mexico, which seemed the proper haven for any kind of lawlessness. Fortunately he was abundantly supplied with ready money. In addition to the large sum he had found in the old wallet he had come across in one of the inner drawers of the safe a canvas bag of gold coin, placed there no doubt by the thrifty German for some emergency such as this when it might not be convenient to get money from a bank. So he had on his person very nearly ten thousand dollars in gold and bills, which ought to suffice

for an extended journey. Ready money gave the young man a comfortable sense of security that he had never hitherto experienced for any length of time. . . .

At a division headquarters where the train was changing engines, Brainard with his head out of the window was gazing interestedly at the motley crowd of plainsmen, greasers, and blanketed Indians. The door of his compartment was brusquely thrown open and one of the trainmen demanded:

“What’s your name?”

Brainard jumped back from the window, replying mechanically, “Edgar Brainard — why?”

“Don’t be scared, stranger!” the official replied with a chuckle at Brainard’s startled look. He glanced through his spectacles at a yellow envelope. “I’m lookin’ for a party named Wilky or Wilkins. You ain’t the feller.”

Brainard stepped forward to take the telegram, but the man had already turned away. It flashed over Brainard at once that probably Farson was trying to communicate with him, using the foolish name he had given the reporter half in jest. The friendly newspaper man, grateful for the liberal gift he had received, was perhaps trying to warn him of some possible danger. It was too late now to get possession of the telegram.

The conductor was passing through the car, asking the passengers their names and exhibiting the yellow envelope.

For the next hour Brainard sat with his nerves on edge, his mind keenly alert to some impending danger. Suddenly the train drew up with a forcible application of the emergency brakes that brought the passengers to their feet. All the men in the car streamed out to the vestibules, and Brainard among them, to see what had happened.

X

"ONLY a bridge gone," was the word disgustedly handed back from mouth to mouth. There had been an unusual fall of rain in the arid country to the north, and for a few hours one of the *arroyos* had become a boiling flood, which had swept away a substantial new bridge. The passengers straggled forward to the scene of trouble.

In the curious half light of the sun sinking into the desert behind and illuminating all the vast high plain with a brilliant reddish light, the huddle of passengers along the right of way and the stalled cars seemed singularly out of place, accentuating the desolate loneliness of the country, where for miles and miles as far as the eye could reach nothing was to be seen rising above the sagebrush and cactus except a range of misty, purple mountains a few miles to the south and a huge water tank a mile or two in the rear. On either side of the petty stream that had already subsided to its normal shallow condition several trains had been caught and held by the loss of the bridge, the Eastern Limited being the last to join the confusion. The passengers on these various trains

had mingled along the right of way and were watching the efforts of a large gang of laborers to build a temporary track across the gully, which was almost completed. Some of the passengers had been there since early morning, and these greeted the newcomers from the Limited with joking inquiries about the state of the larder on their train. It was a good hundred miles in either direction to any station possessing a lunch counter, and the question of supper was becoming of serious importance to the less fortunate travelers. As Brainard talked with some of these passengers from the East, he was given a newspaper brought on the last train. It was the Sunday morning *Albuquerque Star*. Brainard drew to one side and scanned its pages by the fading light. It did not take long for him to find what he was seeking. On the front page of the first section, in the place of honor, there was an associated press dispatch from San Francisco, describing the sensational robbery in the office of a prominent business man. It told without material exaggeration the events of the afternoon before; there was no hint that the affair was more than a daring, but common burglary by a reckless and experienced hand. Brainard rather resented this aspect of the story. In conclusion it said that the authorities had strong clues and expected to lay their hands on the rob-

ber before he would have any chance to dispose of the more valuable part of his haul. Brainard handed the paper back to its owner, chatted for a few moments longer about their common predicament, then strolled thoughtfully back the way he had come.

His was almost the last car of the three trains on the westerly side of the *arroyo*, and as he picked his way beside the track he could hear the few elderly ladies that had not left their seats talking about the delay. It amused him to think what they would say, if they knew that their quiet, well-dressed fellow traveler was the hero of the tale he had just read in the *Albuquerque Star*. There was a peaceful calm here in the rear, for even the porters and the train hands had gone forward to watch the operations of the laborers. The engines puffed slumberously; there was an intense stillness in the air; the sun had just disappeared, leaving a dull red glow in its place.

It was perfectly evident to Brainard that he could not hope to reach Albuquerque without arrest; he must leave the train at the next station of any size, but even that was extremely risky. With searching eyes he examined the country, which was now sinking imperceptibly into the vagueness of dusk. There was nothing for miles in any direction for the eye to rest upon but

cactus and forlorn sagebrush, except that lonely water tank in the rear. There were the mountains, to be sure, but they were many miles away, and he knew that he could never reach them alone with his bag, even if he were sure that he could find a refuge in them. No, it would be suicidal to attempt an escape in this desert! Whatever came, he must run the risk of waiting until the train stopped at some more favorable place. He had come to this conclusion, standing beside the rear platform of the last car, where he could get an uninterrupted view of the vast landscape and was about to seek the seclusion of his own little room, when his eye caught sight of an object in the cactus not far from the track. He soon made out the moving figure of a small horse and a rider, and waited with curiosity to see what sort of person would appear in this desolate country.

The horse dropped to a walk, then halted altogether, as if timid, but soon approached at a slow walk. As far as Brainard could see, the figure was that of a young girl; riding astride a rough yellow pony. The pony crawled within a few yards of the cars, then refused to go farther in spite of its rider's efforts with a quirt to overcome his fear. Brainard walked down the track nearer them.

"Good evenin', stranger," the girl called out. "What's all the trouble he-ar?"

"Bridge gone," Brainard replied succinctly. "Live around here?"

"A ways back, up yonder!" The girl hitched a shoulder in the direction of the south.

"Live in the water tank?" he queried.

"I reckon I don't, stranger," came back in the severe tones of a child whose dignity has been ruffled.

"Then where can you live on this desert — is there a town concealed anywhereabouts?"

The answer from the figure on the pony was a pleasant girlish laugh, and then in the soft, southern tones :

"I reckon, stranger, you won't find much of a ta-own this side of Phoenix — and that's a mighty long ways from he-ar!"

By this time Brainard and the pony had come sufficiently near together so that he could make out the small straight figure. The girl could not be over fourteen, he judged; she was thin and slight, with dark skin and small features concealed beneath the flap of an old felt hat. She wore a faded khaki skirt and leather leggings. In her small bony hand dangled a heavy man's quirt with which she swished the ground, and at times she looked up shyly at the "stranger."

"Where you from?" she inquired.

"New York," Brainard replied.

"New York!" she repeated with an accent of wonder and surprise. "That must be a mighty big ta-own."

"Rather more populous than this — what do you call it?"

"They call the siding back there by the tank Phantom."

"Phantom — is that because it's only a mirage?"

"I can't say. . . . Where be you going?"

"Mexico!" Brainard hazarded at a venture.

"Mexico!" the girl drawled. "That must be a sight farther off than Phoenix."

"I guess it is."

"What are you going to Mexico for, stranger?" the girl persisted.

"Mining business," Brainard fabricated glibly.

"Copper or gold?"

"All kinds, my child," Brainard replied flippantly.

The girl drew herself up with considerable dignity, and remarking, — "I'm agoin' to see what they all be doin' down yonder," stirred up the yellow pony and rode off in the direction of the *arroyo*. She drew up a few rods from the center of activity and stood there in the twilight. Brainard was sorry for his foolish answer that had apparently frightened her away. He went

back to his compartment, and after a few moments' thought grasped his valise and got off the car.

"If she can live in this country, I guess I can," he muttered to himself.

He flung his bag down in the sagebrush and sat on it, waiting until the girl came back. Presently there was a series of jubilant toots from the engine of the first train as a signal of the successful reopening of traffic; then the east-bound trains began slowly to move one by one down into the gully over the temporary track. When the last train had crept by him Brainard rose and sauntered in the direction of the girl. She was still sitting motionless on her pony, absorbed in the spectacle of all these moving trains, — a peculiarly lonely little figure, there in the gathering dusk of the desert, watching as it were the procession of civilization pass by her. . . . After the east-bound trains had got away and were steaming off towards the horizon, the west-bound trains began to file across the break, having picked up the wrecking crew and their equipment. The girl did not move. Evidently in her life this was a rare treat, and she did not mean to lose any part of it. So Brainard waited until the red rear lamps of the last train shone out by the water tank, and then as the girl slowly turned her pony

back he rose from the ground and hailed her.
"Hello!"

The pony shied at Brainard, but the girl easily reined it in. She did not seem much discomposed by the sight of him.

"Lost your train, stranger?" she observed with admirable equanimity. "There won't be no more along 'fore to-morrow morning, I reckon," she added.

"I don't believe I want a train," he replied.

"Goin' to Mexico on foot with that trunk?" she asked. He detected a mirthful note in her voice. Evidently she took neither him nor his pretended mining business with great seriousness.

"That's just what I'm going to try to do!"

"Well, you won't get there to-night, I reckon."

"I suppose not. Can you tell me someplace where I could spend the night?"

"There's the water tank," she suggested, with a little laugh.

"Isn't there somebody where you come from?"

The girl shook her head quite positively.

"There must be some one in this God-forsaken country who would take a stranger in! I don't care about spending the night out here."

The girl laughed as if it were all a great joke.

"There won't be nobody to hurt you, stranger."

"Thanks!"

She started on her road. Brainard thought he was in for a night in the open and cursed his folly in jumping off into the desert. But the girl pulled up after a few steps, and he could hear her gay chuckle as she called out :

"You sure did want to stay in Arizona bad — you lost six trains !"

"I meant to !"

"That mining business must be very important."

"Something else is," he said boldly.

"Was it very bad, what made you want to get to Mexico — a killing ?"

"Not as bad as that."

"What was it ?"

"You wouldn't understand, I am afraid."

"You might try tellin' of me, all the same."

"It isn't anything bad."

"They all say that," she suggested mockingly.

"I'm merely trying to carry out some one's orders."

The girl looked mystified, and after a moment's further thought remarked :

"There's old man Gunnison. He might take you in for the night."

"Where does he live ?"

"Back a ways up the trail."

"Won't you show me the way ?"

"I might," she admitted. "Better give me that trunk," she said, pointing to the bag. "You would sure be tired if you toted that all the way to Gunnison's."

The girl slipped from the pony and expertly made the bag fast to the saddle with the thongs. Then taking the reins, which she drew over the animal's head, she strode out into the darkness. Brainard stumbled on after his guide as best he could. Presently when he became more accustomed to the dark and to progress over the uneven ground he joined the girl and tried to make her talk. She developed shyness, however, and replied only briefly to his questions. She lived somewhere up in the mountains towards which they were traveling and which could be dimly perceived ahead, a soft, dark barrier rising in the night. But what she did there, who her people were, she would not say. In spite of her youth and her inexperience she had a shrewd child's wit that could turn off inconvenient curiosity. Although she drawled and spoke the slovenly language of uneducated people, there was something about her, perhaps her instinctive reserve, that bespoke a better breeding than her clothes and her speech indicated. She did not make further inquiries about Brainard's business; he surmised that she refrained because she thought

him to be some kind of a wrongdoer. He wanted to explain to her his erratic conduct, but he realized that it would be not only foolish but almost impossible to make clear to her limited mind just what the situation with him was. So for minutes there was silence between them while they plodded on.

Brainard liked the girl, felt a strange sort of pity for her, an unreasoned pity for a forlorn and lonely child, who he instinctively divined was sensitive and perhaps unhappy in spite of her flippant speech.

"What were you doing down there at the railroad?" he asked in another attempt to start conversation.

"Oh," she replied vaguely, "nothin'."

"Nothing! It must be a long way from your home to the railroad?"

"It takes three hours to ride it," she replied.

"And do you ride down there often just to look at the trains go by?"

"'Most every week, stranger," she said softly.

Brainard whistled.

"What makes you do that?"

He could feel her toss her head. Her answer was vague.

"They're goin' somewheres."

"And you want to go on them?"

"Perhaps. . . . I expect I shall some day."

"Where?"

"Oh," she sighed, "anywheres — California, maybe, — New York — somewheres I can live!"

The energy with which she uttered these last words had something pathetic in it. As if to avoid further confession, she urged the tired pony to a shambling trot and Brainard again found difficulty in keeping the pace. After another half hour of this blind progress behind his taciturn guide, the girl stopped before what seemed to be a mound of dirt and remarked:

"Here's Gunnison's. Maybe the old man is abed — I'll raise him for you."

She proceeded to pound vigorously with the butt of her quirt on the door of the dugout. Presently there was a sound within, and a human head appeared at the door.

"Here's a gentleman who wants to go to some place in Mexico," the girl said in her gentle Southern voice. "I told him it was pretty fur from these parts, but I reckon you know how to git there, if any one does."

"Will you put me up for the night, anyway?" Brainard asked. "That's the first thing."

"I can do that," the sleepy Mr. Gunnison replied after a time, coming out of the door. "But if you be in a hurry to reach Mexico, stranger,

you'd better go back to the railroad you come from, and take the next train."

"We'll see about that in the morning," Brainard replied.

The girl had already unfastened the bag and mounted her pony.

"Much obliged to you, miss, for all your help!"

"That's all right, stranger," she said cheerily, starting the pony.

"Going home now?" Brainard asked.

"Yes!"

This childish figure, astride the tired pony, riding back into the lonely mountains, seemed to him extremely pathetic.

"Good-by!" he called after her. "Hope we shall meet again some day!"

"Reckon we might, stranger!" came back to him in the soft voice.

"Perhaps in New York?"

"Ye-as — or in Mexico."

Then the pony's feet padded rapidly off into the darkness, and the girl was gone.

"Who is she — do you know?" he asked the man.

"Belongs over in Moniment, in one of them mining camps, I expect," the old man replied indifferently. "I seen her riding past this afternoon."

"Where is she going alone at night?"

"I dunno — guess she knows her own business."

"Such a small girl!"

"They know how to look after themselves, in these parts, as soon as they can creep," the old man remarked calmly. "They have to!"

"Monument!" Brainard repeated to himself, wondering where he had heard that name before.

"That's what they call it. It ain't much of a place now. There used to be a big mine near there, but it ain't been worked in years. . . . You can come right in and bunk alongside of me, stranger."

XI

BRAINARD did not follow the old plainsman's advice to stick to the railroad for his travels. Instead, he induced Gunnison to leave his dugout and guide his chance guest across the Mexican border.

It was not as easy as it looks on the map in the railroad folder to get from Phantom, Arizona — which was the name of the water tank where he had dropped from the train — into the State of Chihuahua; but Brainard did not feel pressed for time. Indeed he judged it might be as well for him to remain out of all possible contact with civilized centers for several weeks, to "let things settle down," as he phrased it. Pursuit would naturally relax after the first unsuccessful attempts and would probably concentrate upon New York where it might be supposed that he would ultimately turn up. Moreover, every day of delay made it less likely that some observing busybody would recall the sensational newspaper story and identify him and his bag with the description of the robber who had left San Francisco on the evening of April 26. Gunnison asked no

questions. The virtue of reticence, Brainard found, was admirably cultivated in these sparsely habited parts of the earth. The old man seemed to have no pressing duties to recall him to his dug-out, and so they followed the trail leisurely, making a few miles each day and occasionally stopping for a day or two to rest while Gunnison procured supplies from one of the small mining towns.

Those weeks on the trail with old Gunnison and the pack train of two horses and a mule were full of joy to the city-bred man, who had rarely escaped the pavements. The high altitudes, the vivid desert colors, the beauty and the savage wildness of this little-known part of the world filled him with ecstatic happiness as well as abounding health. He became hard and rugged, losing the pallor of the city man and all the petty physical weakness that had contributed largely to his fits of depression. Health made a new man of him in mind as well as in body. He hardly recognized himself when he awoke in the morning. Never before had he known what it was to be heartily in love with life, thoroughly vital, eager to act, to plan, to embrace the struggle of living; so light and free from distressing doubts, so willing to test what destiny held in store for him! Just as the exciting events of his sudden journey and his hours in Krutzmacht's office had

awakened his will and his self-reliance, so these weeks of wandering free through the desert and the mountains were the best sort of preparation for a strong, active manhood. Fortunately they had come to him before it was too late, before his character had finally settled into its groove, and new powers were evoked in him, even physical possibilities, that he might never have suspected to be his.

The nights under the glittering cover of the Arizona heavens, the long days of peaceful activity in the sunlight, the silence and the majesty of these vast desert spaces appealed to him strongly, satisfied that love of beauty and of mystery that had been crushed hitherto. Lying awake beneath the stars, his head pillowed on his bag, which had rapidly lost its suspicious appearance of newness, he speculated upon much that had never before entered his head. And his feeling about Krutzmacht and the accident that had brought them together changed. It was no longer a mere wild jaunt, something unreal, like an adventure in piracy. It was part of the great unfolding mystery of the universe that had touched him and enlisted his life. It seemed that he had embarked upon a mission that must end in a great experience.

At this time of life, with the blood flowing ac-

tively through his body, his mind awake to all the voices of the earth, it was but natural that woman should enter into the affair. Krutzmacht's last mumbled word, — that dubious "Melody," — served him as point of departure for romantic dreams. Forgetting altogether his reasonable hypothesis that it might prove to be the name of some firm of German bankers he assumed that "Melody" must be the name of a woman. A queer name, doubtless, especially for one in any way connected with the old German, who seemed to have no affinity for fine art or even womanhood, other than the common stenographer of his office. Nevertheless, in obedience to the desire of his heart, Brainard created a person to fit the name, and thought of Melody as a woman.

From this his thoughts wandered occasionally to the little girl who had guided him to old Gunnison's. He saw her slight, wistful figure as she stood motionless watching the procession of trains, heard her soft voice and gurgling laugh. He resolved to return some day to this wonderful country, his mission fulfilled, and discover that abandoned mining town of Monument, and find there the little girl on the pony who had come to his rescue in the darkness. He had probed old Gunnison for more exact information about the girl, but either he knew nothing more than that

"she belonged up Monument way" or did not care to tell what he knew.

On other matters he was more communicative. He had been long in the country, knew it in the old days before it had been invaded by railroads and large mining companies. He had prospected from the Colorado River south to Chihuahua in old Mexico. He had driven cattle from Texas to Nebraska, and latterly worked on the railroad. He knew Indians, "greasers," miners, cowboys, and for hour after hour he talked of what he had seen "before it got so dern ceevilized in these parts." In other words, before there was a railroad line two hundred miles to the east and another three or four hundred miles west ! He knew where to camp and where supplies could be got without arousing undue curiosity. He knew horses and mules and men. And he taught the young man some of these useful things that he knew so that when they parted in the city of Guadalajara Brainard felt more grateful to him than to any one of the regular instructors of youth, who had given him his so-called "education." He paid him liberally for his services, and the old man, sticking the bills beneath the band of his felt hat, made a few final remarks to his patron :

"I don't know where you come from, my son,—hain't asked yer, and I don' want to know. You've

treated me right, and I've treated you right. I guess if you keep free of cards, and drink, and women, and keep on agoin' due saouth, you'll likely strike the City of Mexico, before you be much older, and keep your belongin's with yer," he added, smiling upon the bag that Brainard had so carefully guarded.

"I think I'll try the railroad for a change," Brainard laughed back.

"It's quicker — sometimes," the old man admitted, "if you don't find too many troublesome persons traveling the same way!"

With this last hint he waved farewell and started northwards for the States.

XII

THE next day Brainard entered the City of Mexico, lean and brown and hard, with a very much travel-stained valise. So far as he could learn from the few American newspapers he had come across, there had been no further excitement over Krutzmacht's death, and the robbery of his safe. If a pursuit had been undertaken, the fact had been carefully kept from the press; and he felt confident that by this time either it had been given up, or the persons interested were watching the wrong places.

There was a steamer sailing for Havre from Vera Cruz sometime towards the end of the month, and he resolved to take it, meanwhile resting and making a few preparations for his voyage. It was the first time in his life that he had been outside his own country, and every sight and sound in this bastard Spanish metropolis filled him with curiosity and pleasure. He secured his cabin on the *Toulouse*, and then set out to do the sights.

The second evening, as he was resting after a busy day in the cool courtyard of the old Hotel Iturbide, a little man in a bedraggled linen duster

hitched his chair across the stones toward Brainard.

"Just come down from the States?" he inquired.

Brainard nodded.

With this slight encouragement, the stranger launched forth upon a rambling talk about himself. He had come to Mexico, several years before, to manage a rubber-planting enterprise, and the "dirty dagoes" had done him out of his last cent. Soon he proposed having a drink with his compatriot, "in honor of the greatest country in God's world." When Brainard refused, saying that he was tired and was going to bed, the American shambled along by his side through the corridors.

Judging that his fellow countryman was a harmless dead-beat, Brainard put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth a bill, as the easiest way of ridding himself of an unwelcome companion. At sight of the money, the man's eyes filled with tears. Taking his benefactor's arm, he poured forth a flood of personal confession and thanks that lasted until they were at the door of Brainard's room.

"Let me come in and talk to you a minute," the stranger begged. "Ain't often I see a decent man from God's country, and I get lonely down here," he whimpered.

"All right," Brainard replied reluctantly, wondering how he could rid himself of the fellow.

When he turned on the electric light, the stranger's eyes roamed carelessly over the room. It seemed to Brainard that his guest exhibited much more keenness than his forlorn and lacrimose state warranted.

As Brainard turned to the wardrobe to fetch a box of cigars, he caught the man's eyes fastened on the valise which was shoved under the bed. Brainard gave him a cigar, but did not invite him to sit down, and after a little while he left, thanking Brainard profusely for his hospitality. As he went out of the door, his eyes rested once more on the bag beneath the bed.

After his visitor had left, Brainard prepared to undress. First he placed his watch and pocket-book on the night table. Over them he laid his revolver, which he had purchased in his wanderings, and, under Gunnison's directions, had learned to use. Now that he was outside the States, whoever might dispute with him the possession of Krutzmacht's property would have to make good his demands. He had lost every trace of that nervous fear which had made miserable the day after his departure from San Francisco.

Before turning out his light, he glanced into the courtyard, and caught sight of his recent acquaint-

tance skulking behind a pillar. For several minutes Brainard stood behind his curtain, looking into the courtyard, and in all this time the man did not move from his post.

There was no reason, Brainard said to himself, why this dead-beat should not spend the night in the courtyard of the Hotel Iturbide. Turning out the light, he got into bed; but he could not sleep, and presently he rose and peered cautiously out into the dark. The courtyard, faintly lighted by the lamps in the office, was empty. This disturbed him rather more than the skulking presence of the American, although he could give no reason for his suspicion beyond the stranger's apparent interest in his valise.

He got back into bed, but not to sleep. After tossing restlessly for another hour, he rose and dressed. As soon as the first light appeared, he took his bag and groped his way through the dark corridors to the office. He inquired of the night porter about trains and found that there was an early morning train to the North. Saying that he had had a bad night and thought he would go to the railroad station and wait there for the train, he paid his bill, not forgetting to add a good tip. The man offered to get him a cab, but he refused, saying that he could easily pick up one in the street. As the porter who had been roused to

something like animation by his *pour boire* unbarred the great door, Brainard asked him casually :

“Do you know that *Gringo* who was talking to me last evening — the one who was hanging about here all the evening?”

“No, señor,” the man replied. “He’s been in and out at the hotel for a week. Just come from the States, and lost all his money at cards so soon. A bad lot!” with a final shrug of the shoulders.

“He told me he had been here several years!” Brainard exclaimed.

“No, señor, that cannot be. He knows no Spanish. Probably he wished money from you to go back to the States.”

“Very likely — well, he didn’t get much!”

After a short walk Brainard came out upon the plaza in front of the cathedral. The cracked bells of that great edifice were clanging inharmoniously for the early mass. Already country people had arrived with market produce, and there was considerable stir in the beautiful May morning. Brainard walked about the plaza until he found an old, muddy diligence drawn by four little mules that was about to start for some village of an unpronounceable Indian name. Brainard took a place inside and waited for it to fill with passengers. At last the driver climbed into his perch,

and the diligence rattled off through the square over the stone streets just as the sun was rising into a clear sky. A regiment of *rurales* came galloping down the narrow street, with its band playing a lively air. The diligence pulled to one side, then turned off towards the west, and soon it was out in the flowering fields of the great plateau. As he left the city pavements, Brainard smiled to himself at the disappointment his acquaintance of the night before might be having at the railroad station. Of course, he might be nothing worse than a stranded dead-beat anxious to sponge a few dollars from a good-natured compatriot who appeared to be in funds.

But Brainard would take no chances! If the contents of his battered valise were as valuable as he thought they must be, the persons interested in securing them would spare no effort or expense in tracking him. Although he had grown brown from the sun and much stouter and had discarded his spectacles, still it would not be difficult for a good detective to identify him from a description furnished by the stenographer.

And if this fellow were really after him, it was not likely that he was alone. So it was important that he should find some small place where he could spend the remaining days before the departure of the French line boat. It was a pity

that the diligence he had chosen at random should apparently be making in the opposite direction from Vera Cruz. But the morning was too brilliant, and Brainard's nerves were too sound to let anything worry him. Thus, with the few words of Spanish which he had acquired while he was with old Gunnison, he launched himself again gayly upon the unknown in Mexico.

"The world is full of ways," he said to himself. "All you have to do is to take one!"

XIII

IF there was a spot on the round earth where a somewhat weary fugitive might spend a few quiet days in absolute retirement, undisturbed by inquisitive intruders, it must surely be the little Mexican town of Jalapa. Situated on a gentle hill not far from the snowy dome of Orizaba, about midway between the hot coast and the lofty central plateau, Jalapa is a mass of green verdure and possesses a delightful climate. All about on the slopes of Orizaba and in the green valleys are extensive coffee plantations, watered by delightful streams. Everywhere great umbrageous trees, tropical in their luxuriance, shade the approaches to the old town. Jalapa itself consists of a few streets of white buildings with irregular tile roofs, a squat cathedral of the Spanish-American type, fertile green gardens carefully walled in, and of course a plaza, which at this season of the year was abloom with fragrant lilies.

To Brainard, after a week of circuitous wandering through Mexican villages, sleeping and eating in filthy places, it seemed a veritable oasis. As

the mule cart in which he had completed the last part of his erratic journey slowly dragged him up the shady hill, he had visions of a good bath and a day or two of complete idleness before moving on to Vera Cruz, to take the boat for Havre. His clothes sadly needed attention, and he was uncomfortably aware that in addition to a useful acquaintance with the Spanish language he had also acquired a miscellaneous assortment of vermin from his recent wandering. The somnolent streets in the hot May afternoon were nearly deserted, so that his arrival in the town aroused little attention. As the mule cart drew up in the courtyard of a clean-looking hotel next to the cathedral and opposite the pretty plaza, he congratulated himself thoroughly on his luck. Having seen his bag deposited carefully in one of the enormous bedrooms that faced the plaza, and accomplished the desired bath, he descended to the *patio* on an exploring expedition. Near the trickling fountain in the center of the *patio* a well-dressed man was seated, reading a book. Brainard instinctively felt that he must be an American from the appearance of his clothes, although his face was hidden by the book. On the small iron table by his side an iced drink was standing. The stranger reached for this and dropped his book long enough to perceive Brainard.

"Hello!" he said calmly, "when did you arrive?"

Brainard recognized the fight-trust magnate whom he had met on the Overland Limited.

"You here too!" he exclaimed. "What brings you down here?"

Hollinger sipped his drink and eyed the young man as though to say, — "we don't ask that sort of question in these parts — it is very crude of you."

"Oh, business and pleasure, — that combination which carries us mortals most everywhere," he observed and with a slight stress added, — "the same I judge that brought you to Mexico."

"Exactly," Brainard laughed. "I can't say how much is business and how much pleasure."

"And possibly a dash of — something else?" Hollinger suggested genially. "Well, let's have another drink on it. *Mozol* . . . A southern gentleman who resides in Jalapa has taught these people how to make his favorite form of booze. It is cooled by snow brought from the mountains on mule back — and is very refreshing."

When the waiter had brought two high glasses filled with the crystal flakes of snow, the fight-trust magnate grew more expansive.

"Yes, shortly after I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance I found the climate of Califor-

nia uncongenial to my nerves, for the first time in my life, and having business interests in Mexico I took a little vacation. Delightful time of the year here, don't you think?"

Brainard agreed enthusiastically.

"You didn't make a long stay with us on the Coast," Hollinger remarked, with the shadow of a smile. Brainard knew that the fight-trust man suspected his story, but judged it wiser to avoid personal confidences. For this reason he refrained from inquiring whether the American's business had to do with some notable encounter that was to be staged in Mexico in order to avoid the laws in the States. Hollinger's next remark seemed to indicate that such was his "business interest" in this country.

"We are apt to look down upon Mexico," he said sententiously. "But it is a great country. We say that it is not civilized. That is just why it is a great country. It is not civilized in our peculiar, narrow way, and hence we deny that it has any civilization."

"It certainly has fleas," Brainard threw in flippantly.

"Exactly, young man — it has fleas and therefore you think it is barbarous. You have been brought up among a people that regards cleanliness as above godliness and the other fellow's

godliness of more importance than his own! That is what is called Puritanism. You understand me?"

Brainard nodded. He began to comprehend the results of Hollinger's reading on the Overland.

"Now," continued Hollinger, clearing his throat, "I have nothing to say against Puritanism. It's a very good thing for some people. It did some mighty fine work in the world."

"Discovered Plymouth Rock, for instance."

"Yes, and created the nicest lot of little hypocritical tight-wads there in New England the world has ever seen. We needed those tight-wads out west — we needed their bank accounts, I mean to say. But we don't need 'em any longer, only they can't understand it and keep shoving their morals in our faces. That's the trouble with America all over at the present date. Puritanism breaks out here, there, and everywhere, like the measles. And it always means trying to make the other feller as good as you think he oughter be — and a damn sight better than you are yourself!"

He paused to send for another drink. Brainard wondered what the august author of the great epic would have thought of this twentieth century criticism of his theory.

"Now Mexico is free from all that sort of cant, and that is why I said Mexico was destined to be a

great country. In Mexico they let the individual alone. You see, the Church is supposed to look after the morals of the community. That is a great relief — it simplifies life and makes it much more honest. The Church does the best it can, and the State helps it out when necessary. But the Church don't expect too much, the Catholic Church I mean, of human beings, and so it isn't disappointed. It all works beautifully! You'll never find in Mexico such a fool performance as that going on in San Francisco to-day. They're no puritans in California either. They don't want reform — they don't want to shut up the cafés and French restaurants and prevent the city council from getting its little rakeoff — not a bit of it! It's only this puritan bug has got hold of some 'better than thous' among us, and they are raising hell."

He paused to finish his drink and wipe his brow.

"It always heats me to think," he explained. "But I was saying that for this reason Mexico has a great part to play in the future. For one thing, it furnishes us Americans a possible place to live in when our own country has one of these righteous attacks and is cleaning house. Lovely country, lovely climate, lovely people — if you know how to handle 'em right. No, sir, I hope they'll never civilize Mexico in my time any more

than it is civilized at present. The natural man needs a country, and Mexico is his country. . . . Come on — let's have a look at the town. The band will be playing in the square a little later, and you will see some of the prettiest girls you ever saw in your life."

The fight-trust man lighted another cigar, put on his panama hat, and tucked an arm under Brainard's elbow, and thus they sallied forth to explore Jalapa. Brainard might not agree with his friend's anti-puritanism, but he heartily agreed with his praise of Mexico. At this gentle hour of the late afternoon soft rosy clouds hovered about the white head of old Orizaba. The gardens, glimpses of which might be caught through iron-barred gates, were fragrant with flowering trees, in which the birds sang madly. After a short ramble about the outskirts of the town, they returned to the plaza, which was now fairly filled with men and women and children, gathered to hear the military band and to enjoy the fragrant coolness of the dying day. Many of the brown *peon* girls were pretty, and the Spanish women, pallid and black-haired, with white mantillas, quite fascinated the young American. A fountain shot a lively jet of water into the sunlight. The great white lilies drooped their golden chalices under shining leaves. The band of Indians at the other end of

the square played operatic music that came through the soft air languorously in harmony with the atmosphere.

"Where in America, the land of the puritan, can you get so much for your money?" Hollinger demanded. "It is only in the lands of license that the people delight in innocent things."

He flung a copper coin to a beggar woman, who crossed herself and blessed him.

"It is even pleasant to give to the beggars, instead of subscribing to an orphan asylum! We make virtue so dull and inhuman." . . .

As they strolled towards the hotel for dinner, they were joined by a tall, lean, lank fellow countryman, whom Hollinger introduced to Brainard as Major Calloway, — "from Alabama, superintendent of the Jalapa-Vera Cruz branch of the railroad." The three dined together in the *patio* with a young German, who was the agent for a firm of coffee merchants in Hamburg. They had an extraordinary Mexican dinner, consisting of the most fiery condiments that Brainard had ever put into his mouth. His eyes were constantly watering, and he drank quantities of water, much to the amusement of the others, who swallowed the pungent food with relish. They sat for a long time over their coffee and some very black cigars that Calloway produced, listening to the stories

the Southerner told. It seemed that he had been in the country forty years, in fact ever since the close of the Civil War, in which Calloway had gained his title. Until recently the railroad had been but a mule tramway and Jalapa not even a "spot on the map." He regarded it now as a metropolis. Mexico according to this old resident was hopelessly tame and civilized under the firm rule of Diaz and the influx of money-making Americans and Germans. "You should have seen it in the old days when a man could live as he liked. Why, they have even got extradition laws for most things now," he complained.

"But they don't use 'em," the fight-trust man put in suavely.

Listening to the regrets expressed by the railroad manager, Brainard perceived that the perfect era of freedom and joy was always somewhat removed from the present time and place. Calloway was most friendly to the young American.

"I'll show your young friend one of the old-time places to-morrow. It isn't far from here — just a pleasant ride of a couple of hours."

So a party was arranged for the early morning, and then Brainard excused himself because of his fatigue, while the others went out to a café for the rest of the evening.

Before sinking into his clean, inviting bed

Brainard stepped to the balcony to look once more at the snowy crown of Orizaba that shone softly in the starlight across the valley. The plaza and the street beneath the balcony were deserted except for an occasional figure that slouched along, covered even to the head with a long cloak. At the next corner he saw a young man leaning against the window of a house, talking to some one within, doing his courting in the manner of the country. A sharp call rose into the night from the distance, answered by another, and then all was silence. From the plaza across the street came the sweet scent of lilies. It was the rich, languorous night of the semitropics, full of perfume and mystery, — romance for youth, — a bit crude, perhaps, and elementary, but appealing to every sense.

Brainard sank asleep to dream of a land of enchantment, full of hidden gardens, the sound of swaying trees and falling water, the scent of lilies, the sweet glances of dark women.

XIV

VERY early the next morning after the usual deep cup of chocolate Brainard joined Hollinger and Major Calloway, and the little party set forth on horseback. They rode through the silent town, between high walls jealously guarding the privacy of large gardens, out into the fields which were drenched with a heavy dew like rain. The birds sang in the arching trees above the road. The sun came up from a golden mist in the lowlands below and touched the hoary crest of Orizaba. Brainard had never seen such an incarnation of spring upon the earth as this glorious May morning, and his heart sang joyously, free of care, forgetful of the burden of his heavy bag and all the coil of events that had brought him hither. Like a schoolboy he was resolved to have his holiday. The lively chestnut horse with which Calloway had mounted him danced mincingly, chafing at the heavy bit. The magnate of the fight trust in a short jacket and leather breeches, a broad straw sombrero on his head, a long black cigar in his mouth, had the appearance of a bull fighter on parade. He too seemed gay in mood, and called

Brainard's attention to the richness of the land, the varied specimens of tropical trees beneath which they rode, the beauty of the landscape, always dominated by the symmetrical snow-crowned mountain. Calloway and the German took the expedition more phlegmatically, discussing the prospects of the new coffee yield.

From the shaded hill road they emerged upon a fertile valley where the *peons* were already at work in the fields. And they also began to meet the country population moving towards Jalapa for the weekly fair. Hollinger, who seemed to have a fair command of Spanish, joked with men and women along the road.

"You couldn't do that in the States!" he remarked to Brainard. "They'd just give you a couple of sour looks and vote for no license." . . .

The little party rode up to the Hacienda di Rosas in time for the second breakfast. The old Englishman seemed delighted to welcome Calloway's friends and presented them to his placid Mexican wife and his two daughters. The younger of these fell to Brainard at the breakfast, which was served in the cool *patio* shaded by a thick canopy of rose vines. Señorita Marie was very small, very pretty, and very naïve, — just home from a convent near Madrid, she told the young American. She spoke English daintily,

mixed occasionally with French and Spanish phrases and some very modern American slang whose meaning she seemed scarcely to understand. She was so unlike the few American girls that Brainard had known, so little able "to look out for herself" as they were, so appealing with shy glances from her black eyes, that from the first moment he scarce remembered where he was or heard the conversation at the other end of the table. She was exquisitely small and dainty, like one of those Spanish beauties by Goya that Brainard had seen in the Metropolitan Museum. Her black hair was drawn close about her delicate head, concealing her ears and setting off the fairness of her skin, which had an underglow of faint rose. Her voice was a murmur and a whisper, at times like broken bird notes, as if meant for one ear alone. They talked of the nothings that mean much to youth. She told him of her life in the convent, her one winter in the City of Mexico with its formal parties, her brother studying to be an engineer in a New York school.

After the siesta they went into the plantation, and Brainard lingered while the others drifted on discussing the culture of coffee and its future. Señorita Marie showed him her favorite walk with a view of Orizaba across the valley, told him that her favorite poet was Tennyson, the flower

she loved best was the rose, the time of the year spring, the time of the day twilight. And she asked him if he had brothers and sisters and was a good Catholic. The time might come, and shortly perhaps, when the childishness of this little mind would be apparent to Brainard, but on this heavenly May afternoon with the birds singing in the thickets and lazy white clouds floating across the snowy summit of the volcano, their talk seemed quite wonderful and the girl herself the most exquisite and adorable creature he had ever known.

"American girls do not talk like that, no?" she murmured, appealing to him.

"No, they don't!"

"Ah, but you see it's different down here — we have only little things to think about, we women, all day long."

"It is very pleasant down here," the young American sighed.

"You like it?" she responded eagerly. "But you would not like it for always. . . . You American men are like that. You come to see the plantation and drink coffee and talk — maybe you flirt a little, no? — and then you ride away and say you will write. But you never write, and you never come back!"

"I shall write, and I shall come back."

The small lady shook her head with a demure smile. They returned slowly through the fields. Yes, this girl was utterly different from the women of his own race, and her difference appealed to him. She seemed, even in her simplicity, more womanly, more as women were meant to be, the protected and the adored. His imagination built up a pretty picture of a dreamy existence in a beautiful country with such a trusting, simple, lovable creature as companion.

"Why do you go away so soon?" she demanded as they neared the house.

"I must take the boat for Europe," he replied.

"There will be another boat in a month."

"Would you like me to stay?"

"Of course! Don't you know that?" . . .

Calloway and Hollinger were already on horseback in the courtyard, about to start without him.

"Are you coming with us?" the fight-trust man asked with an ironical smile.

The Englishman and his wife gave the young stranger a cordial invitation to remain and make a long visit. Brainard was about to accept when he remembered his bag left unguarded in the hotel room.

"I shall have to return to the hotel for to-night," he said reluctantly.

"Well, I'll drive over for you and your luggage to-morrow," the Englishman insisted cordially.

And Señorita Marie whispered demurely, "Au revoir — there's another steamer — in a month!"

So Brainard rode off with the others, very much pleased with himself and life, lightly putting aside his settled purpose of taking the *Toulouse* two days hence. What urgent reason for haste, when life was so full of promise and of beauty? Another month would do as well for Krutzmacht's business. . . .

"You didn't see much of the plantation," the Southerner drawled to Brainard as the young man's horse drew up abreast.

"He saw a great deal of something more to his liking," Hollinger observed, a little ironical smile on his lips.

"I had a very good day," Brainard responded simply, wishing to avoid further reference to the girl.

The daylight quickly faded, and before they reached the hill on which Jalapa lies, the moon was up, flooding the valley and the mountains. Calloway became confidential, and for the first time told the full story of their recent host. Years before, the Englishman had arrived in Mexico and bought this plantation. He was a young man then

and single. He never went home. It seems that he had absconded from a shipping firm in Liverpool where he was employed and had taken ten thousand pounds. Later he married a Mexican woman of good family and had prospered.

"But he never leaves the country. The woman and the girls go — the son is being educated in the States — but the old man has never been beyond the line."

"It must be hard on them — the girls," Brainard said.

"What do they care? Harlow is rich and respected in this country. The women are Mexican, though the girls have been well educated. It was a long time ago when he took the money, and as you see he lives like a perfect gentleman with his own wife and family. There are a good many citizens here who have better antecedents than Harlow and aren't as respectable."

He looked suddenly at Brainard. The young man did not reply. He was thinking that even if the Englishman had been a thief, there was no reason why he should not like the daughter, — yes, and visit the Hacienda di Rosas, if he so desired! He supposed that Calloway had told him Harlow's story for a purpose.

"After you have lived here awhile," the Southerner continued, "you don't ask questions about

newcomers, so long as they play fair and don't try to borrow money of you. Live and let live — that's a good motto, young man. You never can tell when you will need the same charity for yourself that you hand out to another fellow !”

That philosophy seemed a bit specious, and Brainard felt an instinctive repugnance to the morals of his new acquaintances. He suspected that the Southerner might have his own story, which would explain why he was living a lonely old age so far from his native Alabama. Hollinger added nothing to the conversation. It was a somewhat delicate subject with him also. But all the young man's chivalry rose in behalf of the little Mexican girl. This was the reason why young Americans never wrote and never came back ! Well, he would show her that there was one who had the courage to forget that her father was an embezzler.

When they reached the hotel Calloway said good night and went to his room. Brainard was about to follow him when Hollinger yawningly suggested having a drink of *pulque*.

“Ever tried it ? It's not so bad ; like the sort of yeast mother used to make out of potatoes,” and as Brainard demurred, he said more urgently, “Oh, come on ! If you're going to live on a Mexican hacienda, better get acquainted with the

national drink — though that was pretty good claret the Englishman put up.”

They went across the way to a café that was still open and ordered *pulque*. Brainard, after tasting the sirupy, yeasty stuff put his glass down with a grimace. Hollinger drained his and ordered another.

“All you have to do with most things is to get used to ’em. The question is,” he added, looking meaningly at Brainard, “whether you want to get used to ’em! . . . Young man,” he remarked, as they turned back to the hotel, “I don’t want to butt into your business — I am not that kind. I don’t know whether you are traveling for your health, the same as I am, or for some other fellow’s health. But, in any case, —” here his voice became quietly emphatic, “all is, if you’ve got a job to do, do it! Whether it’s cracking a safe or running a city mission, my young friend, go at it and finish with it.”

Brainard threw up his head with all the haughtiness of the young man who considers that he has thus far done very well without outside assistance.

“Just cut out any woman business until the job’s done,” Hollinger continued. “Women are likely to upset most business — they distract the mind, you know. Pardon me for calling your attention to the fact that you seem still young and

somewhat inexperienced in life, in spite of your achievements. Have you fully made up your mind to join the exiles down here for good and all? Better think it over first far away from the señorita's eyes, out at sea. . . . Well, here endeth the first lesson, and good night, and pleasant dreams!"

"Good night!" Brainard replied stuffily.

The porter handed them both candles, and by way of ingratiating himself with his generous patrons announced that two more *gringos* had arrived late that afternoon. Brainard, who was smarting under the fight-trust magnate's moral advice, paid little attention to the servant's chatter and went directly to his room. He undressed slowly, thinking of the charming girl at the Hacienda di Rosas and the happy day he had spent with her. Hollinger's frank warning to get to his "job" and let women alone rankled all the more because he felt the good sense of it. But something within him tempted him to rebel at good sense. He was young, and he had been through a series of strenuous weeks, living a lonely, rough life. There seemed nothing unpardonably weak in allowing himself a bit of good time here in this lovely place. Of course Hollinger's idea that he would straightway marry the embezzler's daughter and settle down in Jalapa for life was needlessly

exaggerated. Probably there would be another steamer in less than a month. And so forth, as youth under such circumstances reasons with itself !

Continuing this debate he went out to the balcony for a last look at the beautiful moonlight night. He lingered there, charmed by the stillness of the deserted streets, by the soft scented air, by the beauty of the white peak towering into the southern heavens. The pleasant murmur of the girl's voice sounded in his ears. He was not in love, he said to himself, — that would be quite ridiculous ! But he was, without knowing it, in a state where a young man soon thinks himself into love.

All his experience since leaving New York led up, as a matter of fact, to this very state. Señorita Marie need not be so extraordinarily fascinating, nor Jalapa so wonderfully picturesque, to set the stage for the eternal drama. He was just repeating to himself one of the girl's naïve remarks when he became conscious of low voices above him. English was being spoken, and by a woman. He remembered what the porter had said about new arrivals at the hotel, and strained his ears to hear what was said. But the speaker was evidently seated within the room overhead, and her voice was too low to reach out and down with

any distinctness. There was something in the timbre of it, or the accent, that seemed to Brainard familiar, — perhaps nothing more than its Americanism. A man's voice, rather guttural and entirely unfamiliar, broke in on the woman's speech. The man must be standing nearer the balcony, for Brainard could hear distinctly what he said.

"I don't see how Mossy let him slip through his fingers in Mexico City, do you?"

An unintelligible answer came from within the room.

"Anyway, it was clear luck our stopping off here to send that wire."

And then suddenly in perfectly distinct though low tones came the sentence:

"You didn't see the grip?"

Brainard knew *that* voice! The pert, crisp twist to the words might resemble a thousand other stenographers in style, but he knew only one that hissed her final words slightly. He held his breath and listened. The woman came out on the balcony, and Brainard noiselessly glided back into the shadow of his dark room. He had seen the profile of the figure above and knew beyond doubt that she was Krutzmacht's former stenographer. The man said:

"I wish I knew which way he meant to

jump next. He's just fool enough to go back North."

"We'll get him, either way," the woman replied with a snap and retreated into the room, closing the French window.

XV

BRAINARD stood without moving until his muscles ached. Then he dropped to the floor, crawled over to the bed, and felt beneath the bolster, where he had taken the precaution to conceal his bag when he had left that morning. It was still there. The room had been casually searched, or possibly his pursuers had only just arrived by a delayed train.

At any rate, he had until the next morning. The woman and her companion would not be likely to make a disturbance that night, feeling that they had him and his plunder safe within grasp. They knew as well as he that all escape from Jalapa was impossible before the early morning train for the North. It must be said that from the moment Brainard first heard the stenographer's voice, every thought of Señorita Marie and of the Hacienda di Rosas dropped from his mind. Danger was a panacea for the early symptoms of love!

While he thought, Brainard took off his shoes, tied them together by the laces, and slung them around his neck, as he had done as a boy, when he wished to make an early escape from the parental

house. Then, placing his precious bag on his shoulders, he crept inch by inch toward the open window. It was hazardous, but it was his only chance. He was morally certain that he could not enter the hall without making sufficient noise to attract attention.

When he reached the balcony, he listened. Not hearing any sound from the next room, he stepped out into the moonlight, and walked as rapidly as he could along the open balcony to the corner of the building, and around to the other side. He knew that the fight-trust man's room was somewhere in the rear wing, and his plan was to make an exit through his room. But the balcony did not extend to this wing, and he was brought to a halt. He looked over the rail to the street, thinking to drop his bag and follow it as best he could. It was a good fifteen feet from the balcony to the hard pavement beneath. As Brainard debated the chances of breaking a leg, he saw approaching the spot the figure of a night officer on his rounds. Instinctively he drew back, felt for the nearest window, and pushed it open. He prayed that it might be an empty room; but he was no sooner within than he heard the loud snoring of a man.

Perplexed, Brainard listened for a few moments, then quietly crossed to the bed. Feeling about

over the night table, he secured the pistol that he suspected might lie there, then boldly struck a match. With a snort, the sleeper sat bolt upright. Luckily it was Calloway, the manager of the railroad. Brainard whispered tensely:

"It's all right, but don't speak! There's your gun — only don't shoot!"

"What's the matter?" the Southerner demanded coolly, now wide awake.

"You said," Brainard whispered, "that there was always a time when a man might need charity. Well, I want your help. I have a bag here that contains valuable papers belonging to some other person. I'm trying to get them to a safe place, as I was told to. I haven't stolen anything, you understand, but of course you won't believe that. I've been followed here by some enemies of the man who owned the stuff. They'd kill me as quickly as they would a fly to get possession of this bag. If they can't murder me, and take it that way, they will probably put me in prison to-morrow and keep me there. I must get out of town to-night!"

"You can't do that before to-morrow morning," the Southerner replied, yawning, as if he wished Brainard would take himself off to bed and let him alone.

"I must get out of this hotel now, to-night, and

away from Jalapa, and not have a soul know where I've gone. I'll pay you well for your trouble!"

"Keep your money, my son," the man answered gruffly. "It wasn't for *that* I had to come down here. But I'll help you out, if you are in trouble."

He reflected yawningly for a few moments, while Brainard held his breath with impatience. For all he knew, the man and the woman might already have entered his room and discovered his flight.

"If it were daylight, it would be different, but you know I couldn't start a train out of here at this time without the whole town knowing about it; and I reckon that isn't what you want."

"Not much!"

"Can't you bunk here with me until morning? Then Hollinger and I can fix up something."

Brainard shook his head.

"I'd run you down myself in an engine to the coast —"

"That's it!"

"But there isn't an engine that can turn a wheel in the place. The first train comes up in the morning."

"I might get a horse and go over to the hacienda," Brainard suggested.

The Southerner scratched his sleepy head for a while.

"You might," he admitted. "But that wouldn't put you out of your trouble and might put other folks into danger. You want to lose these urgent friends of yours for good."

"That's so."

"Got some nerve?"

"Enough to capture this stuff from a court and tote it 'cross country from Frisco!" He patted his valise.

"Come on, then!"

The Southerner drew on his trousers and boots. As Brainard turned impatiently toward the door, he said:

"Not that way!"

He pulled back a hanging at the foot of his bed, revealing a little wooden door, which he opened, and, candle in hand, led the way through a close, dusty passage. After making several turns, they descended a flight of narrow stairs, and Brainard's guide pushed open a door at the bottom. The musty odor of old incense told him that they had entered a church, and the wavering candle-light partially revealed the statues of the saints and the altars of the chapels.

"The cathedral," the Southerner remarked, and added, "Convenient sometimes!"

Brainard followed him closely across the nave of the church to a door, which Calloway unbolted

after some fumbling. They emerged upon a narrow lane with blank walls on either side.

"That hotel used to be the bishop's palace," the Southerner explained. "It's a pretty handy place to get out of on the quiet, if you know the way!"

It was only a short distance to the railroad terminal. Calloway walked rapidly and noiselessly on the toes of his boots, and kept to the dark side of the lane. They entered the yards beyond the station building, and went to the farther end, where several tracks were occupied by antiquated coaches that looked like a cross between open street cars and English third-class railway carriages.

"We used these rattletraps before they changed the line to steam. It took six mules to haul one of 'em up from the junction of the Mexico and Vera Cruz road; but they can go down flying! It's down grade all the way for nearly forty miles. They are rather wabby now, but if you get one with a good brake, it will last the trip."

He tried several of the old cars, and finally selected one with a brake that worked to his satisfaction. Together they could just start it, and they pushed it out to the main track. Brainard threw his valise aboard, and took his post, as the railroad man directed him, at the handbrake.

"I'll open the gate for you, and set the switch; then it's clear sailing. Go slow until you learn the trick, then let her sail. There's a bad curve about seven miles out, and a couple of miles farther on you'll find a considerable hill and some up grade. You must let her slide down the hill for all she can do, and take the grade on her own momentum. If you don't, you may get stuck. I can't think of anything else. You'll roll down to the junction in a couple of hours, as pretty as coasting, if that confounded *peon* hasn't left the switch open at Cavallo. If he has, you'll just have to jump for it, and foot it down through the chaparral, if you haven't broken your neck. Needn't bother to return the car," he chuckled. "Is there anything else I can do for you, young man?"

"You've got me out of a tight hole," Brainard replied warmly, "and I can't begin to thank you for it. I hope I shall see you up North some day, and be able to do something for you!"

"It isn't likely we'll meet in the States. They don't want me up there!" the Southerner answered slowly. "But perhaps, sometime, you'll be able to help a poor fellow out of *his* hole in the same way."

"That woman may strike the scent, and come hot-foot to Vera Cruz by the first train. Well,

I'll have to take my chances there before the boat sails."

"Leave her to me and Hollinger. We'll give her a tip that you have gone North." Calloway laughed. "If she won't take it, there are other ways of stopping her activity. There's a good deal of smallpox hereabouts, you know, and if the mayor suspected these *gringos* had the disease, he'd chuck 'em into the pesthouse. Don Salvador does pretty much what I tell him — and the hotel-keeper, too. I think we can keep your friends quiet."

"Get me twelve hours, if you can! And tell Hollinger I'm on the job again."

The two men shook hands; Calloway pushed back the great gate; and the car slid down the track out into the warm, black night, groaning to itself asthmatically as it gathered impetus.

XVI

THE Transatlantique line steamer *Toulouse* lay off the breakwater of Vera Cruz, smoking fiercely, anchor up, passengers all aboard, ready to sail for Havre. Her departure had been delayed nearly eighteen hours by a fierce "norther," which had not yet exhausted its fury. They had been anxious hours for Brainard, who had gone aboard the night before, in the expectation of sailing immediately. Now the black smoke pouring from the funnel indicated that the captain had decided to proceed, and Brainard's spirits rose.

Nothing had been seen or heard of the stenographer and her companion. Either they had lost the trail, or his friends at Jalapa had succeeded in holding them there for almost two days, and had kept them away from the telegraph, too.

Brainard was about to leave the deck, where he had been anxiously watching the land, when his attention was caught by a small launch that was rounding the end of the pier and heading for the steamer. His hands tightened on the rail; he suspected what that launch might contain. He

noted that the steamer was moving slowly. Would the captain wait?

The *Toulouse* had swung around; her nose pointed out into the Gulf of Mexico, and her screw revolved at quarter speed. The launch approached rapidly, and signaled the steamer to wait. Brainard could see the smart French captain, on the bridge above, examining the small boat through glasses. He himself could detect two figures in the bow, waving a flag, and he smiled grimly at the comedy about to take place at his expense.

The screw ceased to revolve. As the launch came within hailing distance, there was an animated colloquy in French between the officers on the bridge of the *Toulouse* and the man in charge of the launch.

"Some late passengers," remarked the third officer, who was standing beside Brainard. "A woman, too!"

Apparently neither the stenographer — for now he could recognize the young woman — nor her companion, a stout, middle-aged, red-cheeked American, understood the French language. They kept gesticulating and pointing to Brainard, whom they had discovered on the deck. The captain of the launch translated their remarks, and threw in some explanations of his own. The

officers from the bridge of the *Toulouse* fired back vigorous volleys of questions. It was an uproar!

Brainard, in spite of his predicament, burst into laughter over the frantic endeavors of the two Americans to make themselves understood. The captain tried his English, but with poor results. Finally, with a gesture of disgust, he yanked the bell rope. Brainard could hear the gong sound in the engine room beneath for full speed. The *Toulouse* would not wait.

The steamer began to gather speed, the launch to fall behind, while the woman at the bow shrieked and pointed to Brainard. The captain of the *Toulouse* merely shrugged his shoulders and walked to the other side of his vessel.

"Some friends of yours?" the third officer said to Brainard, with a grin, as the little launch fell into their wake and finally turned back toward the inner harbor. "The lady seemed anxious to join you — might be a wife, *non?*"

Apparently he knew enough English to enable him to conjecture what the two Americans wanted. If, thought Brainard, the captain had known as much English as his third officer, it might not have gone so happily for him!

"The lady isn't exactly my wife," Brainard replied, with a laugh; "not yet!"

"Ah!" the Frenchman said, with a meaning

smile. "What you in the States call a breach of the promise?"

"Exactly!" Brainard replied hastily, glad to accept such a credible fiction.

"She seems sorry to let you make the journey alone, eh?"

"Rather!"

The story circulated on the ship that evening, and gave Brainard a jocular notoriety in the smoking room among the German and French business men, who composed most of the *Toulouse's* first-cabin list. It was forgotten, however, before he emerged from his cabin, to which the remains of the "norther" had quickly driven him. By this time—it was the fourth day out—the *Toulouse* was in the grasp of the Gulf Stream, lazily plowing her twelve knots an hour into the North Atlantic, and the passengers were betting their francs on the probable day of arrival at Havre.

That evening, at dinner, Brainard ordered a bottle of champagne, and murmured, as he raised the glass to his lips:

"Here's to Melody— whoever and whatever and wherever she may be!"

His youthful fancy, warmed by the wine, played again with the idea of an unknown mistress for whom he was bound across the seas with her for-

tune in his grip. With the insistence of youth, he had made up his mind that Melody must be a woman — what else could she be? He always saw her as a young woman, charming, beautiful, of course, and free!

And yet she might well be some aged relative of Krutzmacht, or a fair friend of his youth, to whom, in the moment of decision allowed him, he had desired to leave his fortune; or some unrecognized wife, to whom, at the threshold of death, he thought to do tardy justice.

“An old hag, perhaps!” the young man murmured with a grimace. “We’ll see — over there!”

But his buoyant fancy refused to vision this elusive Melody as other than young and beautiful. And he gave her the attractive shape and personality of Señorita Marie. He began to think of her as living in some obscure corner of the great world, waiting to be dowered with the fortune that he had bravely rescued for her.

When Brainard felt that his stomach and his sea legs were both impeccable, he descended to his cabin, bolted the door, pulled the shade carefully over the porthole, pinned newspapers above the wooden partitions, and proceeded to make a leisurely examination of the valise. It was the first safe moment that he had had to go through the contents of the bag thoroughly; and when

the key sank into the lock, his curiosity was whetted to a fine edge.

He had already made a careful count of the notes and gold left after his devious journey to Vera Cruz. The sum was eight thousand dollars and some hundreds. This he had entered on a blank leaf in a little diary, under the heading "Melody, Cr." On the opposite page he had put down all the sums that he remembered to have spent since leaving New York, even to his cigarettes and the bottle of champagne which he had drunk in honor of his unknown mistress.

"Here goes!" he said at last. "Let's see what Melody's pile is, anyway."

It took the best part of the night to examine thoroughly what the bag held. Even after he had gone over every piece, Brainard, untrained in business matters, could but guess at the full importance of his haul. There were contracts and deeds and leases relating to a network of corporations, of which the most important, apparently, was the Pacific Northern Railway.

Despairing of understanding the full value of these documents without some clew, Brainard contented himself with making a careful inventory of them. The meat of the lot, he judged, lay in certain bundles of neatly engraved five-per-cent bonds of the Pacific Northern, together with a

number of certificates of stock in the Shasta Company. In all, as he calculated, there were eight millions of bonds and fifteen millions, par value, of stock.

"Melody doesn't look to me to be a poor lady," Brainard muttered, bundling up the bonds and stock, and packing them carefully away at the bottom of the valise. "They are welcome to the rest, if they'll let me off with these pretty things!"

What was more, he had come across the name of Schneider Brothers, bankers, Berlin, on the letterhead of several communications, indicating that they had been the dead man's foreign fiscal agents. That would be of use to him, he noted, as he wrote the name in his little diary. Then he went on deck, lighted a long Mexican cigar, and began to think. The value of his haul made him very serious. Latterly his adventure had more or less the irresponsibility of a boy's lark about it, but now it assumed larger importance. What he had done was a serious matter in the eyes of the law, and he must justify his proceedings, not only to himself, but to others. . . .

The days of the lazy, sunny voyage slipped away. As the vessel drew nearer Europe, Brainard speculated more and more anxiously on what might be waiting for him on the dock at Havre. Now that he knew how valuable his loot was, he

felt certain that old Krutzmacht's San Francisco enemies, who had tracked him to the dock at Vera Cruz, would hardly be idle during the sixteen days that the *Toulouse* had taken to cross the seas. There had been ample time for them to hear from the stenographer and their other agents in Mexico, to communicate with the French authorities, to have detectives cross from New York by one of the express boats and meet him at Havre. There would be a fine reception committee prepared for him on the dock!

Cudgel his brains as he might, hour after hour, he could see no way out of the predicament that was daily drawing nearer. After the incident at Vera Cruz, he could not approach any of the officers of the vessel and seek to enlist their help. He thought of bribing the sociable third officer to secrete the contents of his valise, but he mistrusted his volatile temperament. There was a Frenchwoman who sat next him at the table, a dark-haired little person, clever and businesslike, who had been very agreeable to Brainard, and had undertaken to teach him French. He could tell his story to Mme. Vernon, and ask her to assume charge of the troublesome valise. But an instinctive caution restrained him from taking any one into his confidence. He preferred to run his chance of arrest, and to fight against extradition.

Whenever he resigned himself to this prospect, his sporting blood rebelled, and there rose, also, a new sentiment of loyalty to the interests of his unknown mistress, Melody. He had come too far in his venture to be beaten now!

"Whether the old man was straight or not, whether he really owned the bunch of bonds and stock or not, it would be a pity not to get something out of it for Melody. She's not in the scrap," he said to himself. "No, I don't chuck the game yet!"

His anxieties were quieted by another fit of seasickness on the day before they were due to arrive at Havre. As she approached the coast of Brittany, the *Toulouse* lost the balmy weather which had prevailed since they entered the Gulf Stream, and ran straight into a gale that was sweeping over the boisterous Bay of Biscay. Brainard went to bed, to spend altogether the most wretched twenty-four hours he had ever experienced.

In his more conscious moments he gathered that the old *Toulouse* was having as hard a time with the weather as he was. Her feeble engines at last lay down on the job, and the captain was forced to turn about and run before the storm. It mattered little to Brainard, just then, whether the ship was blown to the Azores, or went to the bottom, or carried him into Havre, there to be

arrested and finally deported to the United States for grand larceny. He turned in his berth, thought of the *Bourgogne*, and closed his weary eyes.

Toward evening the gale blew itself out, and the battered old *Toulouse* was headed north once more across the Bay of Biscay. Sometime in the night the engines ceased to thump, and Brainard awoke with a start. When he had hurried into his clothes, and groped his way to the deck, he was astonished to see ahead, through the gray fog of early morning, faint lights and, farther away, the stronger illumination that came from some city.

"Is it Havre?" he demanded of the third officer, whom he met.

"No, monsieur — St. Nazaire!" the Frenchman answered. "Monsieur will be disappointed?"

"I don't think so!" exclaimed Brainard.

It was, indeed, the port of Nantes. The captain had not chosen to risk the voyage around the stormy coast of Brittany with his depleted coal supply, and had taken the old *Toulouse* to the nearest port.

"Here's where Melody scores!" Brainard muttered, when he realized the significance of the news. "Now for a quick exit to Paris, before the telegraph gets in its deadly work and notifies the civilized world where we are!"

XVII

THREE hours later the passengers of the *Toulouse* were aboard a special train for Paris, and in a first-class compartment Brainard was seated, facing his valise, and looking out upon the pleasant landscape of the Loire valley, a contented expression on his brown young face.

He had already formulated to himself the exact plot of his movements from the moment he reached Paris. From the pleasant Frenchwoman who had been his neighbor at the ship's table he had learned the address of a little hotel in the Bourse quarter, where she assured him that Americans rarely appeared. It was not far from the large bank in which he intended to deposit Melody's burdensome fortune until he could make arrangements for disposing of it.

It did not take him long, therefore, to install himself at the little Hôtel des Voyageurs et Brésil, and to rid himself of his troublesome loot. Then he wrote a letter to Schneider Brothers, of Berlin, who, he had learned at the Crédit Lyonnais, were a well-known firm of bankers with an agency in New York. He wrote the Messrs. Schneider

that in obedience to the instructions of the late Mr. Herbert Krutzmacht, of San Francisco, he wished to consult with them in regard to the disposal of some securities that he had in his possession. He would remain for the present in Paris, and he begged to suggest that the bankers should send a responsible agent to meet him at some place — preferably The Hague, whither he was going the following week.

He had selected The Hague as a safe middle ground, after consulting the map of Europe in his guidebook.

"That will draw their fire," he thought complacently. "We shall see on which side of the game they are!"

Having mailed the letter, he strolled out to the boulevards to enjoy his first whiff of Paris. This was the city that he had walked in his dreams! He had never hoped to see it; but now he was strolling along the Boulevard des Italiens, and there before his eyes lay the great Place de l'Opéra, with its maze of automobiles, 'buses, and pedestrians. And there — Brainard stopped in the middle of the crowded *place*, wrapped in wonder, staring at the gilded figures on the façade of the Opéra, until an excitable official with a white baton poured a stream of voluble expostulation into his ear, and he dodged from under an omnibus

just in time to fall into the path of a motor, causing general execration.

The official with the white stick finally landed him on the curb before he became an obstruction to traffic. He sank into an inviting iron chair and ordered a drink, as he saw that that was what the Parisians used their sidewalks for. In answer to his labored French, there came back in the purest Irish :

"Whisky, sor? Black and White, sor? Very good, sor!"

"Well, I never!" he murmured, radiant with happiness.

When the waiter reappeared with the drink, he was gazing down the broad avenue, entranced.

"Where does that go?" he whispered to the waiter, thrusting a bill into the curving palm and pointing vaguely before him.

"The Luver, sure, sor. You'll be wanting a nurse before the day is done!" the Irishman muttered.

And indeed the self-contained young American began to act like a lunatic let loose. Gulping down his whisky, he set off at random, plunging again into the sea of traffic, finally escaping to the shelter of a cab. The driver, after vain attempts to extract an intelligible order from his fare, just drove on and on through the boulevards, across

great squares, up the noble avenue to the lofty arch, and then came back to the center of the city and stopped suggestively before a restaurant.

Somehow Brainard managed to get fed, and then the fatherly cabby received him and bore him on through the gas-lighted streets, soft and lambent and vocal, and at the end of another hour deposited him in front of what Brainard took to be a theater — a modest-looking building enough. From the poster he saw that it was the Français.

The great Théâtre Français! He beamed back at cabby, who gesticulated with his whip and urged him on. Cabby had begun sympathetically to comprehend his lunatic.

They played *Cyrano* that night, it happened. Though the fluent lines rolled too swiftly over Brainard's head for his feeble comprehension of the language, he understood the wonderful actors. For the first time in the twenty-eight years of his existence, he realized what is art — what it is to conceive and represent life with living creatures, to clothe dull lines of print with human passions. This was what he had dreamed might be when he descended from his gallery seat in a Broadway theater — but what never was.

Cabby was asleep on the box outside when Brainard emerged from his dream. At the young American's touch, he awoke, and, chirping to his

decrepit horse, bore the stranger to his hotel. At the door they exchanged vivid protestations of regard, and a couple of pieces of gold rolled into cabby's paw.

"He understood!" Brainard murmured gratefully. "*Demain — demain!*" he cried; and the *cocher* cracked his whip.

The next two days were the most wonderful that Brainard had ever spent. He slept but a few hours each night — was there not all the rest of life to sleep in? Under the fat cabby's guidance he roamed day and night. He would murmur from time to time some famous name which seemed to act on cabby like a cabalistic charm, — Louvre, Panthéon, Arc de Triomphe, Invalides, Bastille, Luxembourg, Nôtre Dame. At noon and at night they drew up before some marvelous restaurant where the most alluring viands were to be had. Each evening there was a theater, carefully chosen by cabby; and there Brainard spent enchanted hours, drinking in at every sense the meaning of the play, savoring the charm of intonation, of line, of gesture — the art which seemed innate in these people.

For was he not, as he had said to Krutzmacht, by profession a dramatist?

The third day he bethought him of the French lady of the *Toulouse*, and gave her address to

his guardian. With her he made an expedition to Versailles. On their return from the château, they dined at a little restaurant at Ville d'Avray, the Frenchwoman carefully ordering the food and the wine.

As the twilight fell across the old ponds and over the woods where Corot had once wandered, Brainard murmured softly :

"Melody, my dear, I owe you a whole lot for this — more than I can ever pay you, no matter how much I can squeeze out of those Dutchmen for your bonds and stock!" And then, aloud, "Here's to Melody — God bless her!"

"Mel-odie!" said the French lady daintily. "It is a pretty name. Is that the name of your *fiancée*?"

"No, madam! I have never seen the lady — but I hope to, some day!"

The Frenchwoman smiled and made no comment, puzzled by this latest manifestation of the lunatic American.

After dinner they strolled through the ancient park of St. Cloud to the river, and took a *bateau mouche* for Paris. Mme. Vernon seemed to understand all the pleasant little ways of enjoying life. It was a warm, starry night. The French lady sat close to Brainard, and looked up tenderly into his eyes, but though his lips were wreathed

in smiles, and his eyes were bright, he did not seem to comprehend what such opportunities were made for.

“Not even took my hand once!” she murmured to herself with a sigh, as she mounted the stairs to her apartment alone. “What are these Americans made of? To drink to the name of an unknown, and spend their dollars like sous. And always business!”

For when she had suggested an excursion for the morrow, the young man had excused himself on the plea of “my business.”

“Always business!” she murmured.

But the lady did Brainard an injustice. He was thinking little of business. If she had but known it, he was in love, and dreaming — in love with life, and dreaming of the wonderful mystery of Krutzmacht and of the still more mysterious Melody!

At his hotel there was a dispatch from the Schneider Brothers, appointing a meeting at a hotel in The Hague for the following evening.

XVIII

WHEN a servant had ushered Brainard into a private *salon* of the old Bible Hotel, and discreetly closed the door, an alert, middle-aged German with grizzled hair and close-trimmed beard rose from a table and advanced with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Brainard, I presume?" he said in fluent English. "I am Adolf Schneider."

"So it's important enough for the old boy to come himself!" Brainard thought as they shook hands.

Herr Schneider cast a quick look at the small bag which the servant had taken from Brainard's hand and placed beside his coat and hat.

"You haven't brought the papers with you!" the banker exclaimed with unconscious disappointment.

"They are in a safe place," Brainard replied; "but I have a pretty complete inventory of them."

He drew from his pocket a copy of the list that he had made on board the *Toulouse*, and also a copy of the power of attorney that Krutzmacht

had signed. The former he handed to the banker, who seized it with a poorly assumed air of indifference, and ran his eye down the list.

Herr Schneider's face expanded, it seemed to Brainard, as he neared the bottom; but without making any comment he took a list from his pocket and compared it with Brainard's. When he had finished, he looked at the young man with fresh interest.

"There's some more stuff — books and files of papers, which I packed in a trunk," Brainard explained. "But I had to leave the trunk behind me. It should be safe in Chicago by this time, and I can get it, if it's still there, when I return to America."

"You were thorough!" the banker exclaimed with a smile. "You did not leave much behind you."

Apparently Herr Schneider already knew something about the raid upon Krutzmacht's safe.

"I took everything in sight," Brainard said simply.

"And I am to understand that you have these" — the banker pointed to the inventory — "with you in Europe?"

"They are where I can get at them easily," Brainard replied guardedly.

For several moments the two men looked at each other across the table.

"What do you mean to do with it?" the banker asked casually at last.

"I don't know yet," Brainard replied lightly. "I want to find out what it's worth, if I can."

"Your *coup* has created much excitement in certain quarters. I suppose you are aware of that," Herr Adolf observed in a warning tone. "You will find it difficult to negotiate any securities you may have — if you escape worse complications!"

Brainard realized that the German was speaking diplomatically — bluffing, to use a plainer word.

"I have merely obeyed the orders I received," he observed innocently, handing the banker a copy of Krutzmacht's power of attorney. "Unfortunately, as you know, Mr. Krutzmacht died suddenly, and I am left with only the most general instructions to direct my future movements."

The banker glanced at the power of attorney, and, shrugging his shoulders, handed it back to Brainard. Apparently he preferred to regard the young stranger as merely a clever adventurer.

"That can't be of much use to you," he said coldly.

Brainard tipped back in his chair and eyed the banker. Finally he brought the chair down on the floor with a bang, and, leaning forward, tapped the banker pleasantly on the knee.

"I'm no crook, Herr Schneider — not really, you know! You can think so, if you want to, but it won't make the price of the goods any cheaper in the end. You might like to hear how I happened to get mixed up in this affair?"

He proceeded to tell the story of his movements since that April evening when he had found Krutzmacht in a fit on a New York street. He omitted all references to the vague Melody, who seemed irrelevant for the moment.

"An extraordinary story!" the banker commented, with more warmth, but still dubiously.

"And it's all true!" Brainard cried. "Now I want to know a lot of things from you. First, who was Krutzmacht? And why was the old man so dead set on getting his property over here?"

The banker's manner relaxed into its habitual suavity. This extraordinary young American, who looted safes for a chance acquaintance, amused as well as puzzled him. Evidently Brainard was not easily intimidated. The banker resolved upon another method of attack.

"Really, young man," he said, "you know nothing more than you have told me about your — employer?"

"Hardly a thing — except that he was mixed

up in some big business deals. Naturally, these past weeks, I have wondered a good deal about who he was."

"I should think you might!" the banker agreed, with a laugh. "I can tell you in a few words what I know about him. Mr. Herbert Krutzmacht was a countryman of mine, as you might infer from his name — a native of Mannheim. He went to the States when he was a young man, back in the fifties. Like so many of my countrymen, he carried nothing to your land but his brains and his will. He had many adventures out there. After your Civil War, he moved to the Pacific coast, engaged in mining operations, made a great deal of money, and lost it. He put it all into one property, from which he expected to take a vast fortune, but —"

"At Monument, Arizona?" Brainard interrupted.

"In Arizona, I think. I don't remember the name of the place. The mine was called — let me see — yes, the Melody mine."

"The Melody!" Brainard exclaimed, startled. "So that was it, was it?"

"What was?"

"Nothing — merely a guess of mine. Please proceed!"

"After the failure of his mine he had a hard

time, and everything seemed against him. Then, a few years ago, he got control of a company to develop water power in northern California — the Shasta Company, it was called. From this he went into land and timber business, and finally began to build a railroad, the Pacific Northern. From time to time, as he needed money for his various enterprises, he applied to us, and we found the capital for him when he could not get it in the States. It was our capital, mostly, that went into the railroad, which was to go northward into a region controlled by other roads. That started the opposition in California to him and his schemes, and trouble quickly developed. Your countrymen, Mr. Brainard, are not always scrupulous in the weapons they use. These hostile parties had bought up one of the judges in California, and they struck their blow while Mr. Krutzmacht was in New York a month or more ago conferring with our representative. It had been arranged to raise the necessary funds to pay the interest due on the outstanding bonds, and to complete the railroad. Then Mr. Krutzmacht disappeared, the California court granted the other side their receivership, and he was found dead in a New York hospital !”

“It must have been foul play !”

“What do you mean ?”

"As I figure it out, those crooks must have been watching him all the time in New York, and when they learned that he had succeeded in raising this money he needed to keep his property out of their hands, they did not wait. They —"

"What?" the banker demanded.

"Made away with him — drugged him, probably, then chucked him out of a cab into the street."

"Quite possibly that was it. Your people do such peculiar things! Well, the crooks, as you call them, got their receivership for the Shasta Company — the parent company — the very day he died. Krutzmacht was a fighter, a hard man to conquer, and if he had lived, I have very little doubt that he would have succeeded in worsting his enemies."

"And now?" Brainard asked with a smile.

The banker made a comical gesture.

"The receiver found very little to receive, naturally, after your visit. Of course, you can understand what they were after was not the Shasta Company, but its rich subsidiaries. You had left the shell, of which the Court has taken physical possession."

Brainard laughed.

"The old boy knew what he was about," he said. "There was no time to lose! Tell me,"

he asked abruptly, "do you know whether Krutzmacht had any relatives — any heirs?"

"He must have some connections at Mannheim. Krutzmacht is a common enough name there. But I do not think that any of them were closely related to Mr. Herbert Krutzmacht."

"I don't mean thirty-third cousins. Had he a wife or children?"

The banker hesitated, and then said:

"Several years ago, when I was in New York, I remember meeting some woman with Mr. Krutzmacht at a hotel — a very handsome woman, from one of your Southern States, I judged by her accent. But," he added hastily, "I have no reason to believe that she was his wife. It is probable that one might find out in San Francisco, where he lived the latter part of his life. I could not say."

"So far as you know, there is no one interested in this deal?" Brainard persisted.

"The heirs will announce themselves soon enough, if there are any. Until then," Herr Schneider remarked slyly, "we need not go into the question."

The young American stared at the banker with honest, uncomprehending eyes.

"But that's just what it is my business to do!" he exclaimed. "There was some one, I am sure, whom the old man tried to tell me about."

"Oh !"

"He was too far gone to say the whole name, but I think he had in mind some one whom he wanted to have his money. You see how it is, Herr Schneider. I am acting as this old fellow's representative — his executor, so to speak — to take care of his property and hand it over to some one named Melody, or —"

"Melody?" inquired the banker, puzzled.

"Yes — that was what I made it out to be," Brainard said, blushing.

"But that was the name of the Arizona mine."

"It might perhaps be the name of — of a person, too."

The banker shrugged his shoulders. He turned to the inventory. Putting on his glasses, he re-read the paper carefully. When he had finished, he glanced up, saying :

"Well, Mr. Brainard, now for business, as your people say. What do you want me to give you in exchange for these securities and papers?"

"What they are worth."

"Ah, that would be very hard to say !"

"What would they be worth to Mr. Krutzmacht, if he were here?"

"If Mr. Krutzmacht were alive, they might be worth a great deal," the banker said cautiously,

"and yet they might have no value, now that he is dead."

"He seemed to think they had some value," Brainard said flatly.

The banker fidgeted.

"Oh, of course, naturally!"

"And they can't have lost all their value within a few weeks."

"One company is bankrupt already. This suit, the irregular manner in which possession of these papers was obtained—" began the banker, fencing.

"What will you give, cash down?" demanded Brainard.

The banker rose from his chair and walked to the window. He pulled out a fresh cigar, lighted it, laid it down, and turned to Brainard.

"It is a great risk. We do not know what we can do with the properties. We shall doubtless have lawsuits. We may lose all. Let us say fifty thousand dollars for everything—everything!" he repeated.

The banker looked keenly at Brainard, as if he thought he had been impressive.

"There are over eight millions of Pacific Northern bonds, and about fifteen millions in stock—besides all the rest," Brainard observed reflectively. "It won't do, Mr. Schneider—guess again!"

"Stocks and bonds are worth what you can get for them."

"Then I'll wait, and see if I can get more for these," Brainard suggested smilingly. "There's no hurry about the matter. I came to you first," he said, "because I supposed you would have the old man's account checked up, and know just what was coming to him."

The banker smiled at the young man's simplicity.

"Business is not done that way. It is a question to whom the property belongs," he added meaningly.

"I see! Well, it belongs to me at present —"

"Let us say a hundred thousand — in *cash*, paid to you personally," the banker interrupted hastily.

"You think you are bidding for stolen goods, eh, and can get them cheap?" Brainard suggested.

"Four hundred thousand marks is much money!"

"A whole lot of money — no question about that!" the young American remarked with a quizzical smile, thinking that ten dollars was more ready money than he had had, of his own, for many months. "But it isn't enough!"

"Are you not ready for dinner?" the banker suggested genially. "We can have our dinner

here and talk matters over quietly. I will explain."

They dined at great leisure, while the banker gave Brainard his first lessons in corporation finance, with apt illustrations from the history of Krutzmacht's enterprises. He explained how an individual or a corporation might be put into bankruptcy and yet be intrinsically very rich, — the spoil always going to the stronger in the struggle. He had ordered a magnum of champagne, and pressed the wine upon the young man with hospitable persistence; but Brainard felt that if he ever wanted to keep his head clear, this was the time, and he drank little. He suspected the banker's geniality.

From finance the banker drifted to the topic of Krutzmacht himself. He told many stories of the old man, which showed his daring and his ability to take what he could get wherever he found it.

"He was always talking about that mine — the one in Arizona. He expected to make a very big fortune from it some day. It was to get money with which to develop his mine, I believe, that he went into all the other things," Herr Schneider explained.

"The Melody mine!" the young man murmured to himself.

"That was it! He sank one fortune in it, but he would never let go — that was his way."

When they had reached their coffee, the banker turned suddenly upon Brainard.

"Have you made up your mind to take my offer?"

"Your people here have a good deal of money tied up in this business?"

"A good deal more than I wish we had," the banker replied frankly. "So we must send more down the well to bring back what's there already. We shall have a fight on our hands, too."

"I don't understand business," the young man said. "The chances are that Mel — Krutzmacht's heirs don't, either. That's why he told me to come over here to dispose of his stuff. The best I can do is to take cash and quit."

"Exactly!" the banker beamed.

"Of course," Brainard drawled, "we don't sell Krutzmacht's private things — the mine, I mean — the Melody mine." The banker waved his hand indifferently. "And for the rest you can give us" — the banker held his cigar poised in the air — "two millions."

The banker leaped to his feet.

"You swindler!" he shouted angrily. "You have the impudence —"

"Careful! That's not a pretty name, Herr Schneider," Brainard replied coldly. "Perhaps I am not the only crook in this business. Don't get excited. You don't have to take my offer."

The banker slowly subsided into his chair.

"We shall appeal to the courts!" he snarled.

"What courts? I thought you might try to bluff, and so I suggested having our talk in some neutral place."

"You are pretty shrewd, my young man. You take all these precautions for the sake of Mr. Krutzmacht's heirs, I suppose," he sneered unpleasantly.

"Careful now! I don't mind one bit going to a Dutch jail for slugging you; but what good would that do either of us? The stuff isn't here, you know."

With this Brainard rose to his feet and took his coat and bag.

"Where are you going?" the banker asked in some alarm.

"Oh, I'll take a look about the place, I guess, and then go back to Paris. I don't believe you and I can do business to advantage in your present mood."

"Your plunder won't do *you* any good," the banker observed. "You can't raise a penny on it."

"We'll see about that. There are others who might be willing to pay me something for the paper. I have a pretty good idea that their agents are hunting for my address at the present moment. Suppose I let them find me?"

"Call it a million marks!" the banker snapped.

"I said two million dollars, and I'll keep the bonds, too. You said they were no good, as I understand. They might as well stay with me, in that case. They look pretty!"

The banker gave him an evil look. Brainard, unconcerned, rang for a waiter, and when the man appeared he ordered his bill and a cab.

"When can you deliver the papers — those that you have with you in Europe?" the banker asked briskly, when the servant had departed.

"Whenever you are ready with the cash — two million dollars, not marks — Herr Schneider!"

"One doesn't carry two million dollars in one's trousers pockets, over here," the banker sneered.

"I will give you one week to deliver the cash in Paris," Brainard replied carelessly. "Just seven days."

"Your cab is waiting, sir," the waiter announced.

"All right! You will have to excuse me, Herr Schneider. I want to take a look about the town."

And thus they parted without shaking hands.

"Tell the driver," Brainard said to the waiter, "to show me everything worth seeing in your town."

As he settled himself into the cab for his sight-seeing, he mused :

"I wonder if I got enough ! There's no telling what the stuff is really worth. I'd have given it to him for a million, all of it, if he hadn't taken me for a common sneak thief. Well, I guess I touched his limit. If he lays down on my proposition, I'll have to look up the other crowd, and I suspect there isn't much to choose between them so far as their methods are concerned. But I bet old Schnei will turn up in Paris before the week is out with a bag of dollars. And there are the bonds — they may be worth something, after all, to Melody !"

He interrupted his meditation to squint an eye at a palace toward which the *cocher* was furiously waving his whip.

"All right, *cocher*, — you can drive on," he replied, having taken in the monument sufficiently. "Well" — he concluded his meditation aloud — "two millions, cash, is a pretty good bunch of money for any girl. I don't believe she could have done any better herself. And there are the eight millions of bonds. Now where in thunder is Melody ?"

"*Was?*" the coachman demanded.

Brainard waved him on, and continued his thoughts without speaking.

"There is the mine, too — the Melody mine. Queer name for a mine, and a queer name for a woman, too, now you think of it! Is there any Melody girl — woman, anyway, anywhere?"

The mere doubt of the existence of such a personage dampened his good spirits. If Melody was a fiction of his youthful imagination, he was loath to part with her; for she had become the possible reality that held his dream together.

"No!" he concluded aloud. "No man would have made all that effort, when he was dying, to speak the name of a mine!"

With this sage reflection he dismissed from his thoughts the teasing puzzle of Krutzmacht and his heirs, and devoted his entire attention to the monuments of The Hague.

XIX

FIVE days later Brainard stood chatting with Herr Adolf Schneider and Herr Nathan Schneider on the broad granite steps of the Crédit Lyonnais in Paris. The transfer of all Krutzmacht's papers, except the packages of bonds, had just been completed within the bank, and receipts for them had been given to the young American, together with drafts on New York for two millions of dollars.

"May I inquire what you intend to do now?" Herr Nathan asked, simple curiosity on his broad face.

"I'm going to put in one week more here, then pull out for San Francisco, and try to hunt up my principal," Brainard replied.

"You are not afraid to return to the States?" Herr Adolf inquired.

"Why should I be? Our people know when they are licked. Those crooks won't worry me any longer. More likely they'll be after you now!"

Brainard laughed pleasantly.

"I think," Herr Nathan observed complacently, "we can take care of them."

"I hope so! I want to see those bonds make good some day."

"Don't be in a hurry to sell your bonds, young man. That is my best advice," the banker said gravely.

"I'll tell Mel — my principal what you say," Brainard laughed back. "Now good day to you, gentlemen, and good hunting!"

Herr Adolf shook the young man's hand cordially.

"If you ever want a business — after you have discovered this mysterious heir to Mr. Krutzmacht — why, come over here to me, and I will make a financier of you!"

"Thanks!"

Brainard sauntered slowly down the crowded boulevard. He had before him seven more days of Paris — seven beautiful June days. For he had resolved to give himself one week of pure vacation in Paris as payment for services performed for his unknown principal. Thus seriously did he hold himself to his mission.

At the end of the week he would take the first fast steamer for New York, and begin the hunt for an heir for the money he had obtained from

old Krutzmacht's property — for that shadowy Melody whose name so persistently haunted his imagination. But now how best could he spend these last precious hours of freedom and delight which he had well earned?

The young American with two million dollars in his pockets paused beside the curb and watched the brilliant stream of Paris life flow past him for many minutes. Then he beckoned to a cab, and drove to a steamship office, where he engaged passage for that day week from Cherbourg. Next he went to a tailor, and ordered clothes to replace his Chicago ready-made suit, which no longer satisfied his aspirations in the way of personal appearance. He did not mean to go shabby any longer, no matter what fate might be in store for him at the close of his present adventure.

These necessary duties performed, he betook himself to a famous restaurant near the Madeleine, where he ordered an excellent breakfast. While he ate, he laid his plans.

Brainard had made most of his journey through life without congenial companions, but now he felt a desire for companionship. It was another of those hitherto unsuspected capacities that had been stimulated by his recent experiences. He bethought himself of the only human being he knew in all Paris — the amiable Mme. Vernon,

his friend of the *Toulouse*; so after his breakfast he proceeded to the Frenchwoman's hotel.

Mme. Vernon welcomed him cordially.

"I thought you had returned to America."

"I have another week," he explained, "and I want you to show me how to spend it. Think of everything that a man twenty-eight years old, who has never had a day's real vacation in his life, would like to see and do in Paris, and we'll do it all together. That is, if you can give me the time!"

The good-natured Frenchwoman, who had returned to her native country after a long absence in "barbarian lands," did not seem greatly occupied, and was not averse to spending a few days with this *naïf* American. She smiled upon Brainard.

"It is a serious matter," she said after meditation, wrinkling her placid brow. "And you must see all?"

"Everything!"

"In one week!" she cried. "*Allons* — let us start!"

There began seven days of wonder and delight — enough to pay with good measure for all the sordid years of struggle that the young man had endured; enough to last him, if need be, for a lifetime of dull toil. The amiable Frenchwoman entered into the spirit of her task with enthusiasm.

and a high intelligence, and Brainard paid the way with unquestioning liberality.

"It's my commission on two millions," he said to himself, entering the items scrupulously in his little account book.

From gallery and church and restaurant to theater and opera and café they trailed through the sunny days and the soft nights. They haunted the theaters especially, for the young American — would-be dramatist — felt with sure instinct that here he had discovered the pure gold of his art after the sounding brass of Broadway. They went to the little theaters hidden away in obscure corners, to the theaters of the people, as well as to the stately stages of the Français and the Odéon and to the popular boulevard playhouses.

Brainard was like a dry sponge that soaks and soaks but never satisfies its thirst, so Mme. Vernon declared. With her help, the rapid dialogue of the theater became easily comprehensible. For the young man's ears seemed attuned, his whole intelligence quickened. He was like one arriving, after a long journey, at the promised land.

"You are an artist," the Frenchwoman flattered, "and should stay here with us in the land of artists!"

Brainard merely smiled, murmuring:

"We, too, are artists over there, in our way — artists of life!"

The last day came. At midnight the two companions emerged upon the busy Place du Théâtre Français, beside the plashing fountain. It had been "Phèdre," and the Frenchwoman had yawned through the stately lines of sublime passion. She would have preferred the farce at the Palais Royal, or to prolong their last intimate dinner at Lavenue's, which she loved so well. But the young American had sat enthralled, and now he walked as in a dream, with head erect.

In a few hours more this dream in which he had lived, this inspired world of beauty and art, would have vanished from his sight, never again, perhaps, to dazzle his eyes. Some careless god had taken him from his dingy corner and had shown him what a wonderful place this world can be. Now, after a week spent in the city of his desires, he must return to his own little hole, and let the clouds of reality fall between him and his vision.

"But why, oh, why," he murmured aloud, "can't we have something like that? Why isn't there a place in all America where poor devils like myself could drop in for a few hours of paradise?"

"My poor poet!" the Frenchwoman exclaimed,

guiding his footsteps gently toward a lighted café. "If you like it so much, why dost thou leave thy paradise?"

"Because it is so ordered," he replied simply.

"By whom?"

And as he did not answer, she suggested with a slight smile:

"By that one of whom you spoke — that *Mérodie*?"

"By *Melody*!" he affirmed gravely.

For to-night, on the eve of his departure for America, that elusive mistress seemed especially real and compelling, no mere figment of his heated brain.

"Then, indeed," said the Frenchwoman, with a touch of pique, "you must be in love with your *Mérodie*!"

The young American laughed.

"Hardly. I don't know her!"

"I do not understand."

"Nor I!"

With two millions of ready money lying close to his heart in the drafts of the Schneider Brothers, it never entered the young man's mind that he might prolong his vacation indefinitely.

"Stay with us another eight days," urged his companion, laying a caressing hand upon his arm. "Your *Mérodie* will wait for you!"

Brainard laughed, and for reply paid the waiter and rose from the table where they sat. They walked out into the soft night, and passed through the Tuileries Gardens, across the great square beyond, with its silent monuments and gleaming lights. When they reached Mme. Vernon's apartment, the Frenchwoman urged him to enter.

"It is the last time," she said sentimentally.

Brainard held out a friendly hand; but she would not let him go.

"I have not thanked you enough for this!"

She pointed coquettishly to a lovely pendant which she had admired in a window of the Rue de la Paix, and which Brainard had bought for her.

"That's nothing — just to remember me by!"

"I do not need it for that!"

"Good night," he said, "and good-by — it has been a great week!"

And that was all.

"'Good night and good-by — it has been a great week!'" The Frenchwoman mimicked the young man's words to herself. "*Ciel*, what manner of man can he be? Or have I grown so old?" And she answered herself with a sigh: "No, he's only a poet, and he is in love with — an idea! *Mérodie*! Foolish poet!"

So that was the final judgment of Mme. Vernon.

But out in the gentle June night, under the dark Paris sky, the poet was sauntering beneath the dusky shadow of the Louvre, the music of the lines he had heard that evening floating through his brain. He drifted on past the empty courts of the old palace, toward the river, exalted by all that he had seen and felt during these last seven wonderful days. The spinning moments of his brief dream were too precious to waste in sleep. As he went, he talked aloud to himself.

"We ought to have something like it over there. It *could* be done, too! Melody should do it for us, with a portion of all this loot that I am bringing back to her. She should give something to America to justify her name!"

If Mme. Vernon had heard these muttered words, she would doubtless have qualified her judgment of the young American by adding:

"He is a crazy poet!"

Indeed there was something scarcely rational in the young American's enthusiasm, the glowing intoxication of spirit in which he enveloped Paris. That too had been preparing for him through all the vicissitudes of the past weeks, — by the sudden resolves to commit himself to the sick man's purpose, the growth of will as he met each fresh complication, the physical and moral regeneration of the long trail into Mexico, above

all by the sense of triumph gained in his encounter with the Berlin banker. The crust of his starved nature had broken, and at the magic touch of Paris there appeared the better spirit of the man, — fearless, enthusiastic, worshiping, — the spirit of the artist, as Mme. Vernon had said. Even in his quixotic renunciation, his determination to turn away from the happiness he had found, there was a glowing conviction that this was not the end. The spirit would survive. 'Twas, indeed, but the start, the preparation for another adventure, larger, more thrilling, that loomed before him, across the ocean. Paris also was but revelation and preparation; more was to come ! . . .

The graceful lines of the Palace of the Louvre rose mysteriously into the night, and recalled to Brainard the pages of old Dumas, from whom he had learned to know France. Home of the past, of a great race, home of beauty and art and romance, it called to him, young barbarian that he was, cast by chance upon its shores !

Beneath the stone parapet on which he was leaning, a laden barge passed stealthily over the black surface of the river. He followed it up the quays, crossing the Pont Neuf, over which loomed the shadowy figure of the king on horseback, on toward Notre Dame. All was still

and silent about the old cathedral as he paced under the shadows of the springing buttresses. At last, while he lingered on the point of the island, out of the east came a rosy light that touched the great gray towers of the cathedral. It was the misty dawn.

"To think," he murmured prayerfully, "that I might have died without knowing all this!"

The old stone buildings along the winding river gradually emerged from the gray mist of the dawn and hung as if suspended, floating before his eyes. The thin branches of a tall poplar waved lightly above his head, dropping to him a yellow leaf. A *gendarme* who was patrolling the quay looked interrogatively into the face of the young American, as if he were suspicious of his proximity to the river at that hour of the morning.

"*Beau temps*," he observed amicably to the loiterer.

"What do you say?" Brainard asked, coming a long way down to earth.

The officer repeated his innocent remark about the weather.

"Yes, the *temps* is all right," the young man agreed. "Fine!"

Evidently another of those foolish Americans, star-gazing in the early dawn! The officer lingered near, cocking his eye on the stranger; but

Brainard had started for his hotel, talking to himself as he walked.

"There's a whole lot, Melody, I can never pay you for, even with two millions and a bunch of five-per-cent bonds! Where are you, Melody, in all this wide world?"

Suddenly he stopped, and stood very still. Then, slapping his thigh, he shouted into the dawn:

"Why, Monument! Monument, Arizona! That's it! That's what the old boy was trying to say at the very end, when he was too far gone to make himself clearly understood. He was trying to give me the address, of course!"

The *gendarme*, thinking there must be something wrong with a young man who acted in this fashion, followed Brainard to his hotel, whither, now that he had solved his puzzle, he went at a brisk pace.

XX

To get to that pin-prick on the map called Monument, Arizona, you drop off the railroad at Defiance, which is somewhere east of the water tank named Phantom, and then follow an old post road across the lofty plateau in the direction of the mountains to the southwest. After something more than twenty miles, the trail strikes a deeply sunk river bed that winds like a gigantic serpent over the desert toward the declining sun. In one of the coils of this dead river serpent lies what is left of the mining camp of Monument.

From the dusty trail over the alkali plain Brainard emerged one blazing July afternoon, saddle-sore after his unaccustomed exercise, and red-faced from the pitiless glare of the Arizona sun. As he climbed the rocky path on the farther side of the river bed, the sun was sinking in a gorgeous sky behind the wooden shacks of Monument.

The place had the desolate air of a mining camp that had been smothered before its boom had really come. The stack of a large smelter rose from a group of corrugated iron buildings at the further end. Beyond, on the summit

of a curious detached mound, set quite apart from all other features of the landscape, there was a considerable mansion with tall pillars along its southern front. This, Brainard surmised, must have been the residence of the owner or the manager of the mine, and his present goal.

Apparently Monument had not enough life left to bestir itself, even on the arrival of a stranger. Brainard slid from his horse unobserved in front of the Waldorf Hotel, which was apparently the most pretentious hostelry in the town. Inside the Waldorf, a Chinaman was serving a customer with a meal of fried steak and liver-colored pie. The only other person in the establishment was a fat Irishwoman dozing in one corner of the large barroom, to which the Chinaman referred the stranger, with a silent nod. The landlady — for such he took her to be — looked at Brainard stupidly, and to his request for a room merely dropped her head on her ample breast and resumed her nap.

Brainard turned back to the street, and there the only human being in sight was an old man sitting in front of a tiny cottage, which seemed more decent in appearance than the other residences of Monument. Brainard hailed him, and inquired if there was another hotel in Monument in which he might take refuge.

"There's hotels enough," the old citizen replied with placid irony, "but they ain't doing business these days. I reckon you'll have to put up with the Waldorf, stranger — it ain't so worse!"

In reply to Brainard's complaint that the landlady of the Waldorf would not take notice of his arrival, the old man remarked:

"I expect Katie's just getting over her yesterday's booze. She'll come around after sundown. Come over and sit awhile. There ain't any use of worryin' yourself in this here country!"

He waved an arm slowly over the empty landscape.

"That's a fact — Monument doesn't seem greatly rushed with business," Brainard observed, taking the proffered seat beside the old man. "What's the matter with the place?"

"The matter is that nothing has been doing in this here camp for 'most ten years," the miner replied, pointing to the smokeless smelter.

"Mine gave out?"

"Mine's all right — they never really got into it. The money gave out!"

The old man explained, in his placid drawl, how Monument once had great hopes. Then there had been a dozen Waldorfs in full swing.

The smelter had been built, and shafts sunk in the red-brown hills behind the town.

"The Melody Mine?"

"That's what they called it, and it's as good a mine as there ever was in Arizony — better ore than the El Verde ever had — more money in it than three El Verdes rolled into one, I say!"

"Gold?"

The old man spat contemptuously at a venturesome lizard.

"Gold! Hell, no — copper! High-grade ore."

"What was the matter?"

"Them panic times came along, and the fellow that owned the Melody went broke. He went back to Frisco. I always expected him to ride into camp some day, when the panic was over, hitch down there at the Waldorf, and sing out, 'Howdy, Steve!' and things would begin to hum once more. But he never come back. Guess it's likely he ain't made good out in California."

"Perhaps he's dead now," Brainard suggested.

"P'r'aps — but some other feller will work the mine, one of these days. Copper's booming all over the world, you understand. I'm waiting for that day!"

The old man spat meditatively.

"What is that large house on the hill?" Brain-

ard asked, pointing to the lonely mansion beyond the town.

"That's where the old man lived — Krutz-macht's house," he replied. "He used to live there with his folks."

"He had a family, then?" Brainard inquired quickly.

"Some said she warn't really his wife — couldn't be, because she had a husband where she came from, back East. I don't know. I never asked him. Folks always talk, you understand. Well, she's dead now. The old man left her here when he went away. She stayed on with the girl —"

"With what girl?"

"Her darter, stranger — not his, I guess. She was a scraggly little black-haired thing, more like a boy."

Brainard smiled as his young man's dream of a beautiful heroine, with aristocratic manners and gracious character, crumbled at the miner's touch.

"She used to ride all over the place on her pony — she was a wild sort. Sometime after her mother died, she disappeared."

"Where did she go?"

The old man shook his head slowly.

"Nobody could tell. One night, a month or more ago, she just rode off on the trail. I seed her going down there at a run on her pony, and

she never came back. P'r'aps she was going to look for Krutzmacht. They caught the pony over by Phantom, but nothing has been heard of her since."

"Melody —"

"Yes, that was her name, stranger!" the old miner said with a look of surprise. "Melody White! How did you come to know it?"

"I must have guessed it," Brainard replied with a smile.

"The mine was named after her, or she after the mine; I don't know which."

Brainard stared out into the grim Arizona landscape, before which rose the deserted mansion. There *was* a Melody! He had never really doubted her existence, but this assurance of his conviction pleased him, even though she might not be all that his ardent fancy had imagined.

"And now the house is empty, same as the mine, and I dunno what will become of it all. Sold for taxes, I expect, if they can git any one to buy it!"

They strolled up the road in the direction of the house upon the hill. The austere dusk of the desert was settling over the dreary habitations of Monument. Far away along the horizon purple mountains lifted their heads in grandeur.

The house was so placed that it gave a large

view of the horizon from the mountains to the distant rim of the desert and again to mountains. Close beneath, in wide folds, the river bed wound its serpent course westward into the dusk. Before the broad southern veranda there were signs of old flower beds, which had once been cherished with precious water brought in iron pipes from the river below. The great white pillars had peeled their one coat of paint, and underfoot the sun-dried boards rattled.

The scene was large and grand, but inhumanly empty — as empty as the great house itself. No wonder that the young girl, her mother dead, had fled from this parched desert and these bony mountains in search of the world of men and women, in search of life !

“Kind of lonesome here ?” the miner observed.

“It’s like death !”

“But you get used of it, same as death. . . . She and her mother stayed here by themselves after the old man went, and I guess the girl had enough of it.”

“How old was she, do you think ?”

The old miner wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

“She must have been nigh on sixteen,” he said.

“She warn’t quite ten when Krutzmacht left.”

This girl of “nigh on sixteen” had gone forth alone in search of the stepfather, who for long

years had left her and her mother neglected here.

"Don't you want to see the house? Krutz-macht fixed it up real elegant — carpets and mahogany stuff. Nothing like it in *this* country."

The old man pressed against the warped door, which yielded after a slight resistance. An odor of warm, musty air from the empty dwelling filled the lofty hall, which was quite bare. The miner opened a door leading to a western room.

"They lived mostly in here," he said.

On the floor was a thick Oriental rug, and there were several pieces of handsome furniture, especially a massive, old-fashioned mahogany writing desk and a large divan. On the divan lay a quirt and a woman's cloak, as if they had been thrown there carelessly the day before.

The dust of the desert had already settled on the rug, the desk, the table, and the chairs. Nevertheless, the room presented a singularly living look, such as only the life of people with certain habits and education can impress upon an abiding place. Brainard felt as if he had entered a drawing-room whose mistress had left it in the care of neglectful servants.

Beside the window a small piano stood open, with a piece of music on the rack. Some dead stalks of flowers drooped from a vase, and on the

hearth lay a charred log. Among the spools and pieces of cloth on a worktable was a drawing board, to which was fastened a water-color sketch. A brush, carelessly dropped, had stained one corner of the sketch with a blotch of red. Brainard looked at the water color with some curiosity. It was a young girl's attempt to seize the barbaric splendor of the arid plain outside of the window, fringed with ranges of savage mountains, lighted by the fire of the setting sun.

The two men went up the broad staircase with its white-painted handrail. Only one of the bedrooms had been recently occupied — the one in the southwestern corner, facing the winding river. There a dresser drawer was pulled out, as if it had been rifled by hasty hands.

"Seems as if they were really coming back agin!" the old miner remarked, feeling the personal touch of occupancy. "They allus kep' to themselves. You see, they didn't really belong," he added, as if in explanation.

Brainard went back into the living room once more, and examined the water-color sketch. It seemed to him that this rough sketch was like a sign left for him. It breathed the passion and the longing of the girl hidden away in this lonely corner of the earth. He detached it gently from the board, and put it into his pocket. Then, with

another glance around the deserted room, he followed his guide out upon the veranda.

While the old man busied himself carefully shutting up the place, Brainard leaned against one of the white pillars and stared into the gray evening that had stolen over the plain. She had gone — the mistress whom he had tried to serve so faithfully. She had disappeared into that vast, gray outer world, that the twilight was gradually covering.

All the way across the ocean and the land, and especially on the blazing trail over the alkali plain from Defiance, he had pictured to himself the woman he hoped to find at the end of his journey. He had imagined his interview with her, her emotions of surprise and delight, when he accounted for the fortune he was bringing her. At first she had been but a name, then an idea, and this idea had gradually assumed, in his imagination, the vivid sense of personality. But somehow, in all his speculation, he had never contemplated this! She lived, but she had just flitted forth — whither?

Suddenly it came over him that there was no clear next step. For the first time since he had obeyed Krutzmacht's will and taken the train westward for San Francisco, his spirit was dampened, and in the gray evening a weight of depres-

sion fell upon him. For the moment he had no will, no plan. That which had held all his acts together and made them reasonable to himself had vanished.

Yet the girl had left behind her an impression — a sense of being some one, a person — which he had never had completely before. Somewhere in the universe there really was a young creature with the strange name of Melody White, to whom belonged sundry important properties now in his possession. It was clearly his business to find her if he could ! . . .

The old miner came stamping over the loose boards of the veranda.

"The place will sure drop to pieces, like all the rest," he observed, "if something ain't done to it mighty quick."

"Where do you suppose she went?" the young man asked abruptly.

"The girl? Goodness only knows. P'r'aps she went to her mother's folks, or p'r'aps out to the coast after him — who can tell? 'Twould be like hunting for a young rabbit out there!" He nodded toward the gray plain.

By the time that Brainard reached the Waldorf, the landlady had roused herself, and she undertook to provide the traveler with food and room. After disposing of John Chinaman's fried steak and

liver-colored pie, he went forth again into Monument, seeking further information about the former occupants of the mansion beyond the town. But nothing was known of the two women except the vague rumor that the mother had come originally from "Louisiany way." She had held herself apart from the little community, and most of the present inhabitants of the place, it seemed, were derelicts who had gathered there after the closing of the mine. All the vital population had taken the trail back to the railroad shortly after Krutzmacht's disappearance from the scene.

"Faith, I knew the gurl," admitted Kate, of the Waldorf. "A queer wan she was, too, ridin' around by night and singin' loud up there in the big, lonely house. When you heard her singin' in the dark, it would frighten the heart in you!"

But more positive information the landlady did not possess. When Brainard went to his hot room for the night, he felt "lonesome," as the miner had said — as if some one had missed an appointment with him here in the Arizona desert.

The more he thought about the description the old miner had given him, the date of her final departure, the more he became convinced that he had seen this elusive Melody that night at Phantom when he had dropped from the Santa Fé train and practically thrown himself upon the girl's

good nature to guide him into safety. He was so preoccupied with his own danger at the time, and the loss of his precious bag, that he had not given much thought to the girl, had not even remembered the talk about Krutzmacht's mining venture in Arizona until later. So he had passed her in the dark almost at the start of his adventure — the one whom now he was seeking in a circle !

Even then, in all probability, she had planned her flight, — he remembered how evasive she had been in reply to his blunt questions, — and she had left not long afterwards, within a few days, as far as he could make out. Yes, that must be Melody White, — the girl “nigh on sixteen,” the shy little girl with the appealing Southern accent, who had seemed to him so lonely sitting her yellow pony among the cactus as the night fell on the desert. His imagination fastened strongly on this belief, for it gave him fresh courage and purpose. If she were a being of flesh and blood four weeks before, she must be somewhere now. It was his business to find her. Probably she had gone first to San Francisco in search of Krutzmacht; but when she had learned of his death, where had she gone? At any rate California was the place from which to start the long trail.

And a long trail, indeed, it might prove — the search for a wild young girl on her first journey into the wide world.

XXI

IN the morning, when he descended to the bar-room of the Waldorf in search of nourishment, the old miner greeted him.

"I thought," he said suggestively, "maybe you'd like to see the mine. The Limited don't reach Defiance until evenin'. The mine ain't but a little ways out from here. You might be interested in lookin' it over."

"All right!" Brainard exclaimed. "Let's see the mine." He had been so much preoccupied with Melody, the girl, that he had altogether forgotten about Krutzmacht's interest in the Melody mine. "How far is it?" he asked.

"About three miles back in the hills. The old man was building a trolley from the mine to the smelter here beside the river."

The miner pointed out the rusty rails and bleached sleepers of the trolley road as their horses picked the way over the rough ground up to the opening of the main shaft of the mine.

"Defiance lies off there," the miner said, pointing to the blue horizon, "twenty-five miles in a straight line north. He meant to run a railroad

right across the sagebrush. It's down grade all the way, so the cars could go out by gravity. They reckoned on gettin' power for the trolley from the river, by damming it above the smelter."

"It was to be developed on a big scale!" Brainard exclaimed, impressed by the scope of Krutzmacht's plans.

"You bet!" the miner agreed. "It ain't no use to do things in a small way in this country. Krutzmacht knew that."

Brainard scanned the steep, savage mountains above the shaft. They were devoid of all vegetation on the lower slopes, dull brown in color, with their flanks seamed by little gullies. Behind, the higher peaks lifted their heads in broken lines of serrated edges; and in the far distance, glittering in the cloudless sky, were snowy tips of dazzling white.

The miner picked up a piece of purplish ore from the pile heaped high about the mouth of the shaft.

"Look at that!" he said admiringly. "There's enough ore of that sort right under our feet to pay almost to tote it out to Defiance. And they had just scratched the surface, here and there. The old man didn't reckon to begin mining until he had things fixed right."

They descended from the ore pile and proceeded

to the entrance of the main shaft. It was cluttered with timber and abandoned machinery, some of which had never been installed. They spent a couple of hours examining the mine, stumbling about the dark tunnels by the light of a candle which the old miner had brought, looking at the ore bodies already exposed, ready to be worked.

When at last they emerged into the dazzling sunlight, and were resting, Brainard remarked wonderingly :

"It's queer that a man like Krutzmacht should have abandoned a large property such as this, when he had gone so far with it."

"He hain't abandoned it, I tell you. He paid the taxes up to last year. It takes an awful sight of money, stranger, to develop a big mine so far from the railroad. Krutzmacht's pile wasn't big enough, and he wasn't the kind who'd take anybody in with him. All or nothing for him — that was *his* way. So he went back to California to get his stake. If he's alive still, he'll be coming in here some day ready to work this bonanza !"

"I am afraid that will never be," Brainard said slowly. "Krutzmacht died in New York two months ago."

The miner stared in astonishment, exclaiming at last :

"Well, well ! So the old man died before he

made good!" Brainard nodded. "Maybe you are looking at the property for yourself?"

"Do I look like a miner? No, I came to Monument to find out if the old man left an heir."

"I reckon the only folks he had was that girl and her mother, and one is dead and the other gone goodness knows where," the old miner replied. "So the Melody mine don't belong to nobody now!"

"It belongs to that girl, if we can find her."

"It may be sold for taxes before that."

"Then I'll buy it in," Brainard said promptly.

They ate the bread and bacon they had brought with them for lunch under a pine tree on a slope of the steep hill above the mine. The old miner shook his head from time to time, and muttered to himself over the strange dispensations of Providence that left a rich mine like the Melody abandoned. Brainard thought of the girl who had escaped him, and planned vaguely what his next steps should be.

"There's an old crater up among them hills," the miner vouchsafed, when the last slice of bacon and bread had disappeared, "and some sulfur springs. There's another fortune, maybe, if you could get at the sulfur."

"I'll take a look at it," Brainard said. "How do you go?"

And so, while the old man turned back to look after their horses, which they had left tethered far below, Brainard clambered on among the sharp peaks toward the snow beds that lay in drifts along the ragged edge of the mountains. He passed the circular depression of which the miner had spoken, and noticed the yellow crust upon the earth; but for a long time he kept on upward. He wanted to be alone, to think over a certain daring idea that had seized hold of him while the miner was showing him the neglected riches of the Melody mine. Perhaps the keen mountain air, blowing dry and fresh from the desert below, had its part in stirring his brain to unwonted excitement. Perhaps it was the reaction from his disappointment of the evening before in not finding his young mistress waiting to receive her fortune. However that might be, his idea kept teasing him, expanding all the time in reasonableness and urgency.

Why should he not take up Krutzmacht's purpose — use part of the money he had obtained from the bankers in developing this great property? While he was prosecuting the search for the young girl, which he foresaw might take much time, might indeed end in failure, this work would give a new incentive, a new meaning to his long adventure.

"Give it all to Melody!" the old adventurer had whispered with his last breath. Yes, all to Melody in one form or another, as soon as possible. He would dive deeper than the letter of Krutzmacht's word — he would do as the old man might have done himself, if his life had gone on. He would fulfill his inmost purposes.

He had humor enough to smile at his own daring. "One Edgar Brainard," as he had described himself to Krutzmacht, unsuccessful playwright, scrub of the city streets, to run a mine! But why not? For that old self, that "one Edgar Brainard," buffeted, discouraged human chip on the muddy surface of the stream of life, had completely disappeared, never again to exist, he earnestly hoped. These eventful weeks of vital living, constant and quick decision, of prompt, forceful execution, of vivid feeling and yet calm self-reliance, had made a totally other man of him — one whose possibility he had never suspected, but one whom he liked and respected an infinite deal more than that old, familiar "one Edgar Brainard."

Thanks to Krutzmacht and the elusive Melody, he could never again become the timid, inefficient struggler earning his precarious crust of bread by humiliating tasks, dreaming futile dreams and putting them into equally futile words. He had

tasted of life, action, power, and he found them sweet. He would not resign them ! Thus Krutzmacht had bestowed on the chance stranger who had befriended him in his last need more than those millions he was leaving to Melody.

His rapid thoughts swept over these last weeks. Everything in them, it seemed, had prepared the way for this decision, had fitted him to dare, to take the responsibility. If it had confronted him a month before, when he and Melody had passed each other unknown, he would not have been ready ; if it had come a fortnight before while he was in Paris, he would not have risen to the opportunity. It had come Now, at the fertile moment. . . . His thin, weak body had filled out, just as his harassed face had taken on firm lines of real manhood. He was no longer afraid of life, nor of any of its chances. He would act for this girl as he would act for himself ; he would be her trustee, her faithful servant, and the guardian of her property until such time as it could be given into her hands. And the idle millions should set about their proper task of breeding more millions.

At this point in his thinking he gave a boyish whoop that even caught the ear of the old miner below and made him look up. Brainard waved his hat and laughed from the glorious fun of it

all, — the risk and the joy of life, — living at last ! . . . !

As was characteristic of the new man, having projected an idea, committed himself to a decision, his mind at once bent quickly to filling in the details of the pattern in action. He should go to-morrow across the mountains to look for his old friend Gunnison, to learn what more he could, if anything, about the girl's sudden departure. Gunnison might also give him information of value concerning the mine. Then he should take the evening train for San Francisco, and there first of all he would look up the friendly reporter Farson, to enlist his aid in the search for the girl. In this he must exercise great caution, because San Francisco might not yet be a perfectly salubrious climate for him, nor did he wish to stir cupidinous desires in the breasts of possible claimants to Krutzmacht's fortune. What he should do afterwards was not clear as yet, but he thought that Farson might be helpful in suggesting the best methods for prosecuting such a search as was before him. Hollinger, if he had returned to the States, might also be useful. He would willingly confide in the "fight-trust magnate." In any case he should try to find the grizzled miner from Union, — just why, he could not say. But he felt that the old man who had searched fortune in the

earth for thirty years might be useful in "handling the Melody proposition." He would run across him either at the Palace in San Francisco or, if not there, could stop at Winnemucca on his way east and make the journey to Union. He had the man's name written down somewhere. And then he must call for that trunk in Chicago, in which he hoped to find the title deeds to the mine and other interesting documents. There was much to be done, and to be done speedily. Yet he felt no haste, no nervous anxiety to be adoin'. Time for thought was needed also. . . .

So he climbed on rapidly toward the glittering banks of snow until he reached a small plateau gleaming like a jeweled robe in the sunlight. Beneath him lay the little valley about the shaft, scarred by the ore pits with their abandoned rock piles. Far down, the old miner was leading the horses from the shed where they had been tied. Above beckoned the peaks, reaching into the steely heavens like naked icicles. A broad-winged bird circled majestically, tracing its dark shadow on the gleaming snow field, as with a brush.

Not a sound upon the earth nor in the sky! A broad, deep silence! The clear light, the lofty peaks pointing heavenward — nothing more, except his own beating heart!

The man stood there in the immense silence,

his soul poised like the hawk above his petty world, surveying in one swift rush of thought that little self of his past, with its small ambitions and desires. Up to this level the road that Krutzmacht had opened for him had led.

He gazed steadily upward into the wonderful sea of blue sky, deeper than the blue depth of the Gulf Stream, above the snowy peaks, beyond the world, into his future. What he saw there was a vision of will, man's will. He was all will — a vitalized mass of glorious energy to conceive, to create, to do !

He laughed in the cloudless amplitude of snow and blue heavens, laughed at the small self he had left behind, writing play pieces, making tiny scenes for a tiny stage. The world was the great stage upon which he would present his masterpiece ! Krutzmacht had played on that stage, and Brainard had helped him to put up a rousing melodrama at the close. His own play thereon should be something different.

Krutzmacht's will had made the fortune ; his will should take it, if need be, reshape it, and speed it to some more perfect end than the old buccaneer of the West had ever dreamed of. Where Krutzmacht's will had ended, his will would start.

There rose, too, a vision of art as he had felt it in Paris at dawn, beneath the towers of the

old cathedral. And sweetly the two united in his fecund mind. He laughed softly in the joy of this vision, and his laugh tinkled strangely among the silent mountain peaks. Throwing up his head to the dazzling rampart of snow that broke the wavering azure lines of the heavens, he exclaimed :

“That, too, will come true ! That will be ! We’ll make life our stage, and write the play in life, as God writes upon the snows up here. That is creation !”

Brainard could see the old man below holding the horses by their bridles and shielding his eyes with his free hand, as he searched for his companion. And faintly, very thinly, through the valley came the old man’s hail.

Brainard gave a last, lingering look to the immensity above, beyond, around him — the place where his great idea had been born. Then he turned his steps downward, the light of distant thoughts in his eyes, a smile upon his lips which said :

“I have seen. Now to *do* !”

“You will meet me again before long,” he said to the old miner, when they parted. “And then we’ll make the Melody sing !”

PART II

MELODY

I

"So that's why I missed you in San Francisco four years ago!" Brainard exclaimed. "Because you wanted to write a play!"

He threw back his head and laughed as if the idea was peculiarly ironical.

"Yes!" the ex-reporter Farson replied, with an echo of Brainard's irony. "You see I had always meant to be a playwright and took to reporting to make a living. When you came along and gave me that five hundred for helping you crack the safe and get away with the contents, I chucked the newspaper job and moved on to Broadway — been here ever since."

"Well, how has it gone?"

Farson's face wrinkled comically.

"I haven't quite persuaded Broadway that I am another Sardou. In fact the only creation of mine that ever saw the footlights is a melodrama, founded on our adventures that evening in Frisco. And I sold that for fifty dollars to a western syndicate. I have never heard from it since. I need hardly say it does not satisfy my aspirations."

"So you went back to reporting?"

"Of a kind," the young man replied with a sudden attempt to become important. "I am on the staff of *Bunker's Magazine*."

"And they sent you here to interview me!"

Brainard laughed again.

"*Bunker's* thought that the public would be interested in your rapid rise into the limelight, and as I had some experience in the great West they sent me to extract from you the crude ore of a personal document article," Farson explained with engaging impudence, glancing appreciatively at his subject.

The interview happened to take place in the parlor of a suite in the same large hotel on Fifth Avenue from which almost exactly four years before Brainard had slunk away with the manuscript of his rejected play in his pocket, and had thence wended his way disconsolately homeward to meet the fate that whirled him on during four years of exciting adventure. Numerous trunks and other impedimenta cluttered the room, indicating that the miner, who in the words of Farson "had succeeded in climbing into the limelight" had but just arrived from Arizona and did not yet know that he needed a man servant.

Through the open windows came the roar of the traffic on the avenue, so long unfamiliar to the

miner's ears. He rose from the table, where over a bottle of wine he had been telling the magazine man something about the wonderful Melody mine, and gazed out of the window into the seething stream of humanity below. This unexpected meeting with the reporter of the *Despatch* who had helped him in his first exploit with Krutzmacht's fortune had brought to his memory sharply the great contrast between his last appearance in New York and the present.

His face, now adorned by a mustache and a short brown beard, which the hotel barber had not yet had an opportunity to trim to an artistic point, was reddened and roughened by exposure to the fierce Arizona sun. His hands were large and coarse, as if they had handled every instrument but the pen. His whole person had filled out solidly, and he walked with the awkward gait of one accustomed to the saddle rather than the motor car. But what occupied his mind at this moment was the curious consciousness of that other self, so vastly different, so inconceivably discouraged and weak, whom he could see down below on the pavement, dragging his thin body through the April mist. Whole worlds separated the two! . . .

The magazine man disturbed his reverie by a question.

"You went out there after copper in the first place, didn't you?"

"Yes," Brainard said, turning with a twinkle in his eyes, "I went after copper and got sulfur instead! That often happens in life."

"You went out there as a rank greenhorn," Farson translated, "and come back as the chief representative on this earth of his satanic majesty, — the Sulfur King."

"The Sulfur King!" Brainard repeated with an appreciative chuckle. "That's good. Are you going to write me up for *Bunker's* as the Sulfur King?"

"You had rather have me do that than play you up as a successful safe-breaker?"

Farson looked at the miner with admiration mixed with a little envy, perhaps, as one to whom splendid chances of living had come. From the professional point of view Brainard would make excellent material for eulogy as type of "the man who does things," so ardently beloved by magazine editors.

"Do whatever you like with me," Brainard remarked slowly. "You couldn't make it too wonderful, — nor explain it all. . . . Do you know that four years ago, just at nightfall like this, I stood out there in the crowd, wondering how I could best spend my last quarter for a meal?"

I never dreamed I should be looking down from this window some day !”

He chuckled quietly to himself over the picture. The magazine man pricked his ears for “the human interest note,” divining a life story, and hinted broadly :

“What really put you into mining, after you left Frisco ?”

“How did I get to Arizona? Oh, that’s a long story. I went by way of Mexico and Paris and New York. Help yourself to another cigar.”

After a few moments he added in a less joking tone, — “I went out there in search of an heir to Krutzmacht’s property. I didn’t find her — instead I found the Melody mine !”

“I’d like to hear that story,” Farson said quickly, with the keen scent of the old newspaper man.

Brainard shook his head.

“Not to-day — perhaps sometime. . . . But not for publication — that ! I’ve given you one good newspaper scoop four years ago, and this thing for your magazine. But the other I’ll keep for myself.”

Farson’s face expressed a momentary disappointment. But he merely remarked :

“I’ve often wondered about you ever since I

helped you aboard the ferry with that big bag. Got it still?"

"Yes, what's left of it." . . .

Frank as Brainard had become under the influences of his new life and much as he was attracted by the careless, good-humored young newspaper man, he could not bring himself to tell him the intimate details of his story, which in his feelings was so much more concerned with his unknown mistress than with himself. Ever since that evening when he had stood in the abandoned house above the Arizona desert, surrounded by the mute evidences of the girl's existence, he had prosecuted vigorously the search for the elusive Melody, using every means known to him — and all in vain. There had been no clew whatever that led beyond the railroad tracks. Neither in San Francisco, where he had looked first, nor in New Orleans, where he had gone in the hope of finding some trace of the girl's mother, nor in New York, where the old German was well known, could he learn anything definite of Krutzmacht's family affairs. There were many who had known the business man, but as sometimes happens the business man had admitted no one into his personal confidence.

After the first few months of this search, when forced finally to fall back upon the usual devices of

advertising and employing detectives, Brainard returned to Monument, — the spot where he had found and lost his one substantial proof of the girl's reality, — and there he had taken up the project he had conceived of working the abandoned mine until some heir should be found. Into this project he had thrown himself with all the ardor of his newly awakened temperament and found in the struggles that ensued a relief from the aimless hunting for the lost girl. As time passed with no results from all the agencies he had used in his search, his mind became less occupied with the vision of his unknown mistress, and his life concentrated itself upon this accidental undertaking, — all the more as it proved unexpectedly difficult and failure frequently threatened. His pride and good faith as well as his new manhood were challenged in the struggle, which had only quite recently resulted in abounding triumph. Now that he was free to look about him again and direct his energy into a new channel, the thought of Melody returned to haunt his mind. One of his purposes in coming to New York was to start afresh the hopeless search. An idea came to him as he talked with Farson about the mine. Perhaps publicity of his success with the Melody mine in Arizona might attract the attention of the one most concerned. With this thought in mind

he said to the magazine man, turning away from the window :

“I’ll tell you all you want to know about the mine — you can put it in your story.”

He gave him a lively account of the vicissitudes of the great Melody mine at Monument, Arizona, and his experiences with it.

“So,” Farson summed up at the end, “the copper gave out ?”

Brainard laughed.

“I should say not ! There are millions of tons of copper in those hills.”

“Then what was the trouble ?”

“It cost too much to mine and smelt it at present prices. After pouring a good bit of money into the thing, I found that out. The sulfur looked promising, and we went in for that ; but that, too, came near taking our last dollar before it made good.”

He told the magazine man how he had discovered traces of sulfur in an old crater among the hills, had made tests, and had found that the mineral existed in great quantities and almost pure. But when they went after it, new difficulties were encountered — quicksands. One method after another was tried and found useless, until the experts he had summoned were ready to give up the job. Then, almost in despair, Brainard

had experimented with a novel method of extracting the sulfur by pumping steam through one pipe into the earth and taking the solution out by another. It was successful.

"It's a steady yellow stream out of the bowels of the earth — a stream of gold!"

The young man sighed with envy.

"Better than gold," Brainard continued. "A thousand per cent better! I wouldn't dare tell you how much money that yellow stream pours into my pockets every twenty-four hours."

Farson's eyes gleamed, and he looked covetously at the bulging pockets of the miner's loose coat.

"So you made good," he said; "and of course you came up here to New York, straight off, to spend your money."

"That's it," Brainard assented with a laugh.

"It's a good place to enjoy oneself. What are you going to do?"

Brainard looked quizzically at the ex-reporter.

"Get some clothes, first. I need 'em, don't you think?"

Farson candidly admitted that he did.

"But," he added, "you don't seem the sort to blow your money the usual way — chorus-girls, or country places, or yachts, or stock market, or —"

Brainard shook his head vigorously at each item of gratification mentioned.

"What *are* you going to do with that yellow stream?"

"I have my idea," Brainard admitted.

"That's what I want to know."

"I'll tell you, and you can make another article about it, if you like."

The young man leaned forward, all eager attention. Brainard smoked thoughtfully, then began.

"You've written plays — got one in your pocket this minute, probably."

"You don't mean you are going to write plays!" Farson said disgustedly.

"No, my boy — not now. I tried it once. But I hope to make it possible for you and other young men to write their plays and get them put on the stage. I'm going to build theaters, here and in other cities. I shall found a national society of dramatic art. That's the way I'm going to blow in the money from the sulfur stream as long as it flows!"

"Whew!" The magazine man whistled dubiously. "Another uplift movement for the poor drama?"

"Let me explain," Brainard continued.

With much more eagerness than he had shown over his exploits with copper and sulfur, he sketched the story of his great idea, which had

first taken possession of him that last night of his week's stay in Paris, while he wandered through the silent streets. He told of the vision that had come to him in the snowy heights of the Arizona mountains, in the silence of earth and sky — a vision of beautiful art that might be created into reality by the aid of the wealth which he could give it. He had set himself earnestly to the task of getting the necessary gold out of the ground, and all through these years, in the vigils of his lonely nights in the mining camp, he had nursed his vision.

He poured out his heart freely to Farson, because he was young and a would-be dramatist, and could understand; and Farson, listening to the story of this idea, became warmed with the enthusiasm of the other and forgot his habitual journalistic skepticism.

"It's big!" he murmured.

"And now it will no longer be just an idea. It's to become fact! I have the money — at least, it's mine for the present." Brainard corrected himself. "One can do something with half a million or so a year."

"Half a million a year!" the young man gasped.

"More or less — at present rather more, I should say," Brainard admitted carelessly. "Depends on the market for crude sulfur, you under-

stand. It's pretty strong just now. And there's the copper to fall back upon, when the price of copper goes up. There's no need to worry about the money."

Just here they were interrupted by a boy with a card.

"Show the gentleman up!" Brainard exclaimed, glancing a second time at the card.

The magazine man rose reluctantly to go, saying:

"Another time, if you would be good enough to tell me more about your plans —"

"Don't go!" Brainard interrupted warmly. "If you are interested, stay, and you will hear more about my great idea. This gentleman has come from Chicago by appointment to talk it over."

"Thanks!"

"Why don't you drop that magazine job?" Brainard suggested abruptly. "I shall need a secretary. I think you would be the right sort. Why not begin *now*?"

"Done!" the journalist exclaimed boyishly, and they shook hands. This was a millionaire after his own heart, who did things casually at the drop of the hat with the most surprising ease.

"You'll have a better chance to write your plays," Brainard remarked genially.

It pleased him to think that here, on the spot where he had experienced his last defeat, he was able to play the part of good fortune to youth.

"Somehow," said Farson enthusiastically, "I feel it's going to be like a play all the time with you!"

"The chap that's coming up to see me," explained Brainard, "is an actor and a manager in a small way. He calls himself Ferris MacNaughton — an odd genius, a Scotsman who has played all over the world. I ran across him in a small Arizona town, doing Shakespeare to the mining camps, and doing it well, too. He seemed interested in the idea, and so, when I got ready to pull out, I wired him to meet me here. He hasn't lost any time," he added as the door swung open.

II

It was a curious figure that entered the room. The Scotsman was short, thick-set, about fifty years old, with a round, bald head fringed with white hair. He was dressed with an evident attempt at youthful smartness, and dangled a small cane. Between his thick lips was the end of a black cigar. His large face, portentous brows, and mild blue eyes looked as if he had started as Falstaff and ended as a Scottish Hamlet.

MacNaughton bowed profoundly, and said in deep, measured tones, that were reminiscent of blank verse :

“Good afternoon, gentlemen ! I received your telegram yesterday, Mr. Brainard. It found me at an unoccupied moment in my career, and I am happy to place myself at your disposal.”

Farson grinned. He judged from his acquaintance with Broadway that the unoccupied moments in the Scotsman's career had been frequent of late years, and that he had spent a good many of them in the outer offices of theatrical managers. He wondered how his new employer, who seemed wide awake enough to capture one fortune and

make a second, had come to mix himself up with this seedy actor.

"Good!" Brainard exclaimed genially, shaking MacNaughton's hand. "This is my secretary, Edward Farson — Ferris MacNaughton. Let us get to work at once and see how we can spend the better part of half a million a year on the theater!"

At the casual mention of this large sum of money, the old actor did a bit of unpremeditated acting, displaying astonishment so genuine that it set the secretary laughing. He recovered himself, and remarked in his Shakespearian tones:

"One might do a good deal on even less!"

The three sat down about the table, and lighted fresh cigars. Brainard presently drew a small, much worn note book from an inner pocket, and began turning its leaves, reading thoughtfully from time to time:

"Item first — create an organization that will build and support theaters in the chief cities of the United States — to be called in every instance 'The People's Theater.'"

"Good!" the actor assented loudly. "I have always maintained that the drama came originally from the ranks of the common people, and should be the chief means of their education."

The magazine man made a wry face. The "People" according to Broadway were visitors

from out of town who would pay two fifty apiece for the "show" — any show. Brainard read on :

"Item second — no boxes and no reserved seats in the People's Theaters. Highest price of seats, one dollar, and free matinées on Saturdays."

"You will need a million !" Farson murmured.

"I used to find it so hard to get a good seat when I wanted to go to the theater," Brainard explained. "Even when I had scooped together the price, for some extraordinary occasion, I couldn't get nearer than the twelfth row. Every theater was always sold up to that row, no matter how early in the day I got to the box office. I have an invention in mind that will register every seat sold or given out, and show it on a diagram, to put an end to the usual practice. But let us get to more important matters !"

He read out different items :

"Exchange of the different companies in the organization — a college of dramatic art — cafés in the theaters — libraries of dramatic literature — open-air theaters in the suburbs and city parks, etc."

"But," the actor inquired sententiously, "what do you propose to give the people in your theaters ?"

"Plays, of course !" Brainard replied. "All

sorts of plays that are worth while, old and new !”

“Shakespeare, Ibsen, and Hauptmann,” the actor remarked voluptuously. “Sophocles, Molière —”

“Hold on !” Farson put in. “Where will you get the people to sit through that ?”

“My dear young sir,” the actor retorted paternally, “the people love the *best*. I have played the classics in every State in the Union to enthusiastic audiences, — sometimes small.”

“You bet !” Farson murmured.

“But always enthusiastic !”

“We must have modern plays, too,” Brainard added.

“But all the modern plays are copyrighted, and the dramatists are under contract to Einstein & Flukeheimer, and their brethren.”

“Then we’ll make our own playwrights,” Brainard replied placidly. “Here’s one !” He tapped the younger man fraternally on the knee.

The secretary subsided.

“And the companies ?” the Scotsman inquired.

“They make the piece !”

“The very best actors, of course,” Brainard agreed enthusiastically. “We’ll pay the highest salaries and give long contracts and pensions — that’s all in the scheme. You will help us to

organize the parent company, Mac. I'll give you a free hand."

The old actor closed his eyes in a happy dream. He saw himself at last as a metropolitan impresario, dealing magnificently with the "talent."

Brainard read on, but before he had finished the note book — which contained a remarkable mixture of detail and aspiration — dinner came up. They talked as they ate, and they talked afterward as they sipped their coffee and smoked. They became heady with enthusiasm, for Brainard's imperturbable optimism and faith in his idea were like drafts of Arizona air, intoxicating to those who lived in lower altitudes.

The actor, mellowed by good food and good wine, — and more by the confidence this new Croesus seemed to have in him, — discoursed almost tearfully of aspirations and ambitions suppressed through long years that were now within the possibility of realization. He had always wished to devote his life to Ibsen and the great classics, he declared, but the box office had prevented the fulfillment of his artistic ideals.

"I'm the box office now," Brainard laughed, "and I am here to fulfill ideals!" He picked up the note book again. "I had forgotten the college of actors, for both sexes, which we must run in connection with the enterprise. It will give free

tuition, of course, and there will be scholarships for promising pupils. You will have to look after that, too, Mac."

"Haven't I been training lads and lassies who couldn't speak the language all my life?" the old Scotsman burred.

"We should recruit our road companies from the college," Brainard suggested.

"It will take a good deal of time to do all that," Farson remarked.

"We've all the time in the world," Brainard retorted confidently. "Make a note of that, Mr. Secretary!"

So they talked on as men will talk, when it is still a matter of words and not actions. Late in the evening, or rather early in the morning, Brainard developed his plan for an outdoor theater in some beautiful mountain spot, or on an island along the seacoast. It was a bit of fairy fancy which he called the "Summer Festival." Every summer, for a few weeks in August, in some sylvan spot of great natural beauty, with a background of lofty trees and cliffs, there would be held a dramatic festival, where lovers of the art could resort to live for a time in the atmosphere of Sophocles, Calderon, Molière, Goethe, Shakespeare.

"A kind of theatrical camp meeting," the secretary jokingly named it.

"Exactly. Imagine an open-air theater built upon a cliff, with the blue sea below, backed by thick trees and a wild forest park, where the audience might stroll between the acts and after the performance. Think what could be made of such a place!"

It was the final flash of Brainard's vision, and they sat for some time in silent contemplation of what was before them. At last the old actor spoke in a husky voice:

"My boy, it is sublime! It has come almost too late for me. I cannot walk your great stage and triumph in your triumph. My days are nearly over, spent in miserable efforts to exist and not debase my noble art. But I can help, and I pledge to you and to the People's Theater all the strength that is left in me."

The old Scotsman's eyes were moist with tears. Here was another whom the great idea had touched and lifted to unexpected heights, Brainard thought happily.

"You'll have your chance to act, too," Brainard remarked consolingly.

"What do you mean to do first?" the secretary demanded impatiently.

"Incorporate, and find an architect," Brainard replied concisely.

"Another trust!"

"A beneficent trust."

"What we need is publicity," the young magazine man announced. "I'll look out for that!"

"What we all need now," laughed Brainard, "is sleep. We've done enough for one day." For the early morning procession of drays had begun to thunder over the pavements beneath the window. "And to-day I must engage a tailor and consult with my banker."

"Before we go," Farson said, "let us drink to Aladdin and his sulfur lamp! Here's to Aladdin, the Sulfur King!"

They drank the toast, and another proposed by the actor:

"The American Drama!"

And a third which was scarcely intelligible to Farson, although the old actor considered it quite suitable:

"To Melody!"

Then they separated. In this gay and careless fashion the plot was laid for pouring half a million a year into the Sulfur King's great Idea.

III

THE new secretary had some difficulty in convincing Brainard of the importance of what he called "publicity." His own varied experience as a newspaper and magazine writer had given him a deep faith in this modern method of propaganda. He constituted himself at once the publicity agent of the new undertaking.

"It's the only way to do things in this country. You must scatter your idea about in the newspapers and magazines, get people to talk about it and read about it, or it is dead before you start."

Rather against Brainard's inclination, Farson set off the first of a series of journalistic squibs concerning the "Sulfur King," his spectacular fortune, and the novel manner in which he purposed to spend it, in a profusely illustrated article in the new *Bunker's Magazine*. Brainard submitted to this indignity because of his desire to advertise the Melody mine and in this way possibly attract the attention of its unknown mistress. But of all the letters that came to him

after the publication of his spectacular biography, not one was from "Melody."

The People's National Drama Society had not been incorporated before the sputter in the daily press began, with long-winded remarks by theatrical experts — actors, managers, and critics — predicting failure and ridiculing "the new uplifter of the stage from Arizona." The public yawned and skipped. There was nothing new in this "uplift" talk about the drama; but the "Sulfur King" was new, and the public was much more interested in him and his golden stream of wealth than in his dream of creating a popular drama.

All sorts of mythical tales began to appear in print concerning his personality. The story that obtained the widest vogue was that Brainard, having in his younger and penniless days sighed in vain for the favor of a theatrical lady, had gone off to Arizona with despair in his heart, "struck sulfur," and now had returned to build a palatial theater on Broadway for his old flame. A rather obscure young actress was named as the heroine of the tale, and the lady, when asked about the story by reporters, failed to deny it. Instead, she coyly led the newspaper men to embroider further details on the theme.

"See what you've got me into with your pub-

licity business!" Brainard exclaimed ruefully, holding out the morning newspaper to Farson, when the latter came for the day's work to the little house on Gramercy Park into which Brainard had moved.

The secretary, who had already seen the article, merely grinned and admitted:

"She has the cheek! They are all like that — anything to get themselves talked about. But it's all right — it helps to spread the great idea."

"I should say it did! Look at that!" Brainard pointed to a sack of mail that had been poured out over the library table. "And there's a lot more, they tell me, at the post office. We shall have to open an office and hire some clerks, or chuck it into the fire."

"It all helps," the ex-reporter affirmed, dipping his hands into the mass with zest. "You don't understand the American public yet. It has to have Romance with a capital R to sugar-coat any idea before it will swallow it."

"There was pretty nearly everything in yesterday's mail, from an offer of marriage to a recipe for making a successful play, not to mention one hundred and eighty-seven specimens of original American drama."

"Here are a few more of the same sort," the secretary laughed, tossing out a handful of bulky

packages. "The literary committee will have something to do when it finds time. That's me!"

He tossed the manuscripts into a corner.

"The thirty-first application for position as leading lady from an actress 'of established reputation, at present on the Oregon circuit' — that goes to Mac's pile," he remarked, throwing the lady's letter into a basket. "Proposal of marriage, marked 'strictly personal,'" he continued, handing over an envelope to his employer. "We must get out some printed forms for acknowledgment of these — one for marriage, one for plays, and one for positions in the company."

"If this is publicity, let's try for privacy!" Brainard groaned, tearing the marriage letter into bits.

"Here's a new note!" Farson exclaimed, pausing in his swift disposal of the mail to read aloud a letter.

"GENTS:

"I saw in yesterday's Kansas City papers a piece about your new theater. I think your idea is *fine*! It's all right! Have you got a part for a beginner who will take anything or everything, but wants to begin? I know I've got stuff in me, and I *must* see New York. Please reply.

"Yours anxiously,

"LOUISIANA DELACOURT,

"P. O. Box 8, Iole, Kansas."

"I think that Louisiana should get a chance to see New York," Brainard observed.

"She might take less than everything then. What do you say?"

"Put her down for the college," laughed Brainard. "She thinks the Idea is fine."

And that is how Miss Louisiana Delacourt, of Iole, Kansas, became the first pupil in the new college of dramatic art, which was not yet founded.

When the second mail came in with a large assortment of begging letters and more manuscript plays, Brainard rose in disgust and seized his hat to flee from his own house.

"Don't forget Mrs. Pearmain's — luncheon at half past one!" the secretary warned.

"Confound Mrs. Pearmain!" Brainard muttered. "Just tell her I've gone out of town, Ned."

A look of horror spread over the secretary's handsome face.

"It wouldn't do! She's to have a lot of important people there to hear about the Idea. She would never forgive you. It would spoil everything at the social end," the young man pleaded. He had worked for weeks to "start the social business," as he called it, and thus arouse an interest of a fashionable kind in their undertaking. This luncheon at Mrs. Pearmain's was

to be the brilliant opening of a social campaign that should go hand in hand with the more democratic press campaign. It was unthinkable for Brainard to refuse from whim or shyness or fastidiousness the gracious advances of Society !

"I don't like all this woman business," Brainard remarked sulkily, laying aside his hat. "Whatever did you get us into it for, Ned? I don't need their money."

"No, you don't need their money," Farson pronounced oracularly, "and that's just why you'll get what you do need. You need their influence. You can't get anything started without the women — not in America. A movement for art in any form couldn't exist, if the women didn't take it up. Why, there isn't any Art in any form in this country, except what the women keep going. So far as literature, drama, and music go, there's but one sex in America, and it doesn't wear trousers either !"

"Lord !" the young Mæcenus groaned, "I didn't know that, Ned."

"There's a good deal you don't know about America and Americans that you'll have to learn, if you want to make good in this thing," the secretary commented severely. "That's what you need me for — to open your eyes."

"Thanks," Brainard murmured humbly.

"You will find Mrs. Donnie Pearmain the very one to give the right *cachet* to the movement."

The young man rather prided himself on his social knowingness acquired since his return to New York. Brainard sighed, and, with a grimace, resigned himself to Mrs. Donnie Pearmain. The secretary proceeded to prepare his master for the coming luncheon.

"You know what she did for the half orphans last year? The year before it was the tuberculosis campaign. But now she's giving up mere charity for art, and ours is the very thing to interest her. The Rev. Thomson Spicer will be there."

"The clergy, too!"

"Of course. They make the next best publicity agents after the newspapers. They preach about popular movements, you know. You'll see what Spicer will do for us next Sunday. He's much interested in the moral influence of the theater upon the masses."

Brainard groaned.

"President Nathaniel Butterfield of Eureka University has also promised to be there."

"Professors? Ye gods! Where will you stop, Ned?"

"Dr. Butterfield has views on the educational value of the stage."

"I'm not founding a religious kindergarten!"

The secretary, ignoring this feeble protest, consulted his note book for further details.

"Jaggard, the banker, has been asked, and Toowit, of the *Daily Beacon*, and my old boss, Howard Bunker. A very representative gathering of prominent persons!" the secretary commented complacently. "They would make an admirable board of trustees."

"What do you propose to trustee — me?" Brainard roared.

"Every movement has to have a board of trustees — a list of good names to print at the head of the note paper, you know," the young man explained patiently. Brainard's simplicity was occasionally wearisome, and he was proving more difficult to handle than Farson had expected. It required considerable tact at times "to keep the 'Sulfur King' all on the track." He remarked to pacify his employer, "They don't interfere unless you ask them for money, and of course you won't have to do so in this case."

What Brainard might have said about wrapping his great idea in a wad of distinguished trustees was prevented by the appearance of Mac-Naughton. He came into the library at that moment, with the air of an old diplomat, which was the rôle he had affected since he had joined the movement. His quiet gray suit was adorned

with a small red button. He wore horn-bowed eyeglasses and carried a large leather portfolio. An unlighted cigar protruded from his mouth.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he remarked, settling himself in a chair opposite the secretary and turning over the pile of applications for positions in the companies of the new society. He slowly dropped the letters to the floor. "All rotters, every one of them," he announced with a profound sigh. "My boy, will you please hang out the sign, 'No lady help wanted'?"

"Are you sure they are all so bad?" Brainard asked hopefully.

"My dear fellow," the old Scotsman replied languidly, "there are at least three thousand women in New York to-day, young and old, who think they can act and want a chance to take your money. I've seen twenty-nine hundred and ninety-nine of them!"

"There must be some good ones eager for the opportunity we offer."

"All those that are any good, and many that aren't, have signed up with Einstein & Flukeheimer and the other managers. I tell you they have passed the word up and down Broadway to have nothing to do with us. They call us cranks!" the old actor cried. "We are black-listed, sir — that's what it is."

"But with this great chance to do something for dramatic art?" Brainard protested, quoting from a conversation he had had with a famous actress.

"Talk!"

"The opportunity to devote themselves to their profession, relieved of all sordid cares?"

"More talk!"

"Their desire to subordinate personal ambitions for the good of dramatic art?"

"All talk!"

"We'll have to double the salaries, then."

"Even that won't bring the better ones who have made names already. They don't want to compromise themselves with highbrows. We shall have to start with unknown talent and build up our company gradually."

"That will take time, but I like it better," Brainard replied optimistically. "Show him Louisiana's letter, Ned. That's the right spirit."

"The little dear," MacNaughton commented ironically. "How many like her there are!" He dropped the letter in the secretary's basket.

: Presently there appeared the architect who had been asked to prepare plans for the first playhouse. The three gathered around him and examined the voluminous prints and water-color sketches that he had brought with him. He was a young man, and he had seen his opportu-

nity, with the wealth of the sulfur king behind him. He had planned a monumental building of marble, with beautiful colonnades, a magnificent foyer, reception rooms, a restaurant, and a library. Behind, in the form of an annex, was the college of dramatic art with its own little theater, lecture rooms, and dormitory. The whole looked like a public institution for the insane rather than a simple theater.

"What do you think it would cost to build?" Brainard inquired, as they came to the last sheet.

"I should think it could be done for three millions," the architect replied glibly.

"Three millions," the secretary repeated easily.

"Three millions — um !" MacNaughton echoed, as one who dealt habitually in seven figures.

Brainard said nothing. He was thinking, perhaps, that the Melody sulfur spring must gush like a yellow geyser to pour forth enough gold for the Idea as it was expanding from day to day. He had learned, however, not to be daunted by large figures — the mine had taught him that — nor did he ever allow himself to worry over expense. He had wasted his youth in such fruitless cares. As a man he would do what he could, and then stop.

Presently the three left for Mrs. Pearmain's luncheon. The secretary thoughtfully took with him the plans for the new theater.

IV

MRS. DONNIE PEARMAIN, as everybody knows, is the only daughter of old Joseph P. Barton, the founder of the milk trust, and derived her very ample personal fortune from that famous financier's successful manipulation of the milk market. Starting as a plain New Jersey farmer, who peddled his own milk, Barton organized the great trust, and when he died was its largest individual stockholder. It was he, too, who first generally introduced the use of the small glass bottle instead of the large tin can in the distribution of milk, thereby enabling the trust to add at least thirty per cent to the retail price of its product.

In spite of these accomplishments, financial and hygienic, Barton was one of the most widely misunderstood and execrated of the older generation of millionaires, doubtless because of the abnormal increase in cost of this necessary article of domestic consumption, and its deterioration in quality, since the formation of the milk trust. Consequently, although Barton's daughter had married into glue — one of the Pearmain sons — which is, of course, an eminently quiet and re-

spectable fortune that has escaped the keen eyes of the muckrakers, she had never been able wholly to live down the taint of milk. Too many even of the social leaders of the city remembered the small bottles of Barton's pale-blue fluid, retailed as milk at nine cents a quart, to forgive the social ambitions of Mrs. Donnie Pearmain, in spite of her respectable veneer of glue.

The energetic little lady, however, had learned from her rich father his great life axiom — if you can't do what you want in one way, you can in another. So she attacked the citadels of social leadership by the way first of Philanthropy and now of Art, as the magazine man had accurately related to Brainard. Thanks to her energy as patroness in these allied fields, she was in a fair way of living down at last the odor of milk and attaining the coveted reward of social leadership.

Mrs. Pearmain had received Edgar Brainard most graciously in the previous interviews that had been arranged between them by the young secretary, and had shown a most intelligent interest in his scheme of creating a People's Theater. The young sulfur king appealed to her all the more because he expected no financial assistance in developing his hobby. She would not be called upon to pour any milk into this philanthropy.

She did not in the least doubt that Brainard's

controlling purpose was the same as hers — to become properly known in society by identifying himself with a popular cause, and she commended his sagacity in taking this means of living down sulfur. Therefore she had easily been brought to lend her influence to the Idea. At Farson's suggestion, she had gathered together, in her great house on the upper avenue, a most distinguished luncheon party, which, as the secretary had shrewdly said, would give éclat to any letterhead.

When Brainard arrived, with his companions, he was shown into the picture gallery, where Mrs. Pearmain was chatting with her guests. He was immediately presented to each one. They examined him with curiosity, for even in New York a young man with an annual income of more than half a million, which he desires to spend upon the public, is not a common phenomenon.

The university president, who looked like a banker, was especially affable, and stuck closely to Brainard's side. Dr. Butterfield sincerely regretted that he had not had the good luck to capture this young Croesus before he had committed himself to this freakish idea about the drama, and hoped that there was still some stray million which he might divert into the channels of the higher education at Eureka.

It was for this purpose that he had torn himself away at midday from his many duties at the university. The other guests, understanding the game, looked on with sympathetic smiles.

Brainard had spent two dreary years at Eureka where he had found little to relieve the ignominy of his dire poverty, and thus he knew something about "old Nat," as the head of that institution was familiarly known among the undergraduates. When in the course of their conversation Brainard admitted that he had been enrolled at the university, Butterfield beamed upon him with a new warmth and remarked eagerly:

"How interesting! I didn't know that you were a Eureka man."

"I didn't graduate," Brainard confessed.

"Ah, that's too bad! I presume you left college for the more arduous education of a business career?" the college president suggested.

"I left it to earn a living," Brainard replied simply.

"Exactly," the president said with a deprecatory cough. "That's what I meant."

He made a mental note of the fact that Brainard had been a student at Eureka. The university should be able to use that happy fact; the trustees might consider it proper to bestow an honorary degree upon this distinguished half

son, who had somehow managed to achieve fame and wealth after deserting the maternal halls. And immediately he began to compose in imagination a few of those celebrated periods with which he was accustomed to bestow academic honors upon similar practical "sons of Eureka."

"Can't you find time to come out to us some day?" he inquired deferentially. "I'm sure the boys will be delighted to welcome you back to your old home. A little address at chapel? It is a great inspiration for young men thus to come into touch with persons who have made their mark in life."

Brainard merely laughed. He remembered a number of occasions when "old Nat" had introduced distinguished visitors to the academic audience in somewhat similar words. . . .

At the luncheon Brainard was seated between the college president and his hostess. He easily recovered from his natural shyness and talked fluently of Arizona and sulfur. The others listened deferentially to him, and in the many subtle ways that these people understood of testifying their consideration for a promising man he was made to feel welcome.

The banker, who had already put him on his list of capitalists that might be interested in some "undigested" railroad bonds his house had on

their hands, was especially attentive. Indeed there was something of a contest for the guest's attention between the banker and the university president, who each understood the other only too well. The banker, of course, did not commit the crudity of talking finance or even business; instead he discussed "public service" and "the new spirit of capital." The kindly gleam of his shrewd blue eyes seemed to say to Brainard, — "You are one of the new kind, who will do everything for the dear Public!"

And so before the succession of excellent courses had gone far, Brainard had forgotten his distaste for the social side of life, which he had expressed so vigorously to Farson that morning, and really believed that all these good people were as eager as he was to give the American public a superior form of dramatic art at prices within the reach of the poorest. And when he began to talk to the company at the conclusion of the luncheon, after a few words of flattering introduction from the hostess, he had no trouble in finding what he wanted to say.

"First, you will forgive me if I say a word about myself, by way of introduction," he began, with an engaging smile. "Four years ago, just about, I was here in New York, down and out — a poor, discouraged scribbler, earning a precarious

existence by writing furniture advertisements, and sneaking into the upper gallery of a theater when I could get the price of an admission ticket."

The magazine man, at the farther end of the table, writhed uncomfortably over this introduction. Why, he said to himself, go back—so far back? But the others seemed much interested, and as Brainard went on with his personal story, describing, in simple, straightforward language, life as he had lived it on the other side of the fence—its monotony and sordidness, its lack of interests that relieved from toil and worry—it was apparent that he had hit upon the best way to secure the attention of these people. There were some present, like Butterfield and Haggard, who had begun very near the beginning, and these liked to feel again the unmeasureable distance that separated them from their former state. Others, like Bunker and Mrs. Pearmain, thought the story so "picturesque" or "dramatic." It served to increase their complacency at not "having been through all that, you know." To Toowit of the *Beacon* and the few of a middling prosperity the tale of a rich man's marvelous rise was exasperatingly titillating to the nerves.

Brainard touched briefly on the dramatic occurrence that had suddenly lifted him into action.

His auditors looked as if they would like to hear more of this; but he paused after saying:

"I won't go into that. It made another man of me — the man you see here now, that's all!"

In a few moments he resumed, throwing back his head:

"My friends, I have had a vision!"

"Oh," thought the secretary, "why doesn't he come to the point? They don't want to hear about his dreams!" But with that simple earnestness which was the most characteristic quality in his developed character, Brainard persisted in his effort to share his idealistic enthusiasm. He concluded his confession of faith with the words, — "It is not mere amusement, my friends, that I wish to further — it is life!"

Dr. Butterfield nodded his head approvingly at this point. He had said something not unlike this a few weeks before, when his college dedicated a new hall, the gift of a whisky millionaire. But the editor of the *Daily Beacon* looked thoroughly bored, and presently slipped away. All this idealistic talk was merely angel food for ladies and parsons, he seemed to think.

"I promised myself," Brainard continued, "that if I were ever free to do so, I would give myself wholly to this Idea — give myself and all that I

could command of resources to found a national theater worthy of our great people."

Then, taking his little worn note-book from his pocket, Brainard ran rapidly over the details of his plan, most of which we have already learned. The magnitude of the scheme seemed to appeal at first to this fashionable audience; they were accustomed to deal in large figures, complex enterprises, and size stimulated their imaginations like alcohol. Oddly enough, it was only when he mentioned a small detail—the low, fixed scale of prices to be charged at the theaters—that the first dissenting voice made itself heard.

"You will pauperize the people!" the banker objected. That, he urged, was the trouble with so many humanitarian movements; they deprived the poor people of the joys of competition. The point passed, however, after a feeble discussion. That was a detail evidently to be settled later when the exigencies of deficits would doubtless force a more practical view upon this enthusiast. But a chorus of objections rose when Brainard said that the theaters were to have no reserved seats and no boxes.

"No boxes!" Mrs. Pearmain murmured, as if personally affronted. "But where shall *we* sit?"

"Where the others do," Brainard replied promptly.

Significant glances were exchanged about the table. Was this a socialist who had slipped in among them in disguise?

"Think what the opera would be without the boxes!" a large bejeweled woman whispered to her neighbor.

"These are to be the people's theaters!" Brainard remarked somewhat sharply.

"Oh, I hadn't understood!"

"Where will your theater be in New York?" some one asked.

"That is yet to be decided. I am looking into the matter to determine where the largest number of people can most easily reach a theater by the transportation system of the city. Somewhere on the lower West Side, I suspect."

"Nobody will ever go down *there!*" several protested. "Everything is going up town all the time. . . . The Opera is too far away. . . ."

"Everybody can get there most cheaply and easily," Brainard returned.

From this point interest waned visibly, and the company merely gave a polite half attention to the remaining notes, including the plan for a great summer festival of drama.

"It sounds like a Chautauqua," Butterfield superciliously remarked. He detested these popu-

lar efforts for education, regarding them as "scabs" on the genuine industry.

"It would be exceedingly drafty, an open-air theater in the American climate," said an old gentleman. "Think of a Bar Harbor fog!"

When these trivialities had passed, Brainard hastily read a few notes on the ideals of the enterprise — the careful staging of plays, the giving of classics, the revival of old plays, the need for purity of speech, something about poetic plays and the new drama.

As he read, there were signs of impatience. At the close came the hard, round voice of the Rev. Thomson Spicer :

"What sort of plays, may I inquire, Mr. Brainard, do you propose to give in your theaters?"

"All sorts," Brainard replied, surprised.

"I trust there will be a strict moral censorship."

"I agree with you, Dr. Spicer," Mrs. Pearmain added in a severe tone. "The greatest care should be taken not to incite the people to discontent with their lot. Many of the plays given to-day are most dangerous in their tendency. They hold *us* up to ridicule, and even criticize our morals and our fortunes!"

It was here that Brainard committed his unpardonable blunder, and the secretary knew

that he had finally "queered himself" with these influential people.

"I think," he said sternly, "that the people should be the judge of what plays they want to see. You would not try to tell them what to eat or drink, would you, Mrs. Pearmain?"

There was an unfortunate allusion, perhaps, though unconscious, in the word "drink"; for that was precisely what Joseph Barton had done to the people — he had made them drink a very inferior grade of blue-white fluid called milk.

Brainard was rebuked by a stony silence, for his unintentional *faux pas*, and then there burst forth a flood of criticism. For an hour these good people tore to tatters the fabric of his dream. There seemed to be a perplexing double fire of objections. A few, the Reverend Spicer among them, felt that Brainard's ideas about the sort of dramatic art suited to the people were dangerous and anarchistic. Unless such a scheme were carefully hedged in by a sound conservatism, it might work more harm than good. Others — and these were in the majority — asserted that it was altogether a mistake to found a people's theater on the level of the people. Art was always aristocratic, they maintained, and the people should be invited guardedly to partake of the intellectual entertainment provided for them by their

superiors in a playhouse situated where the best classes could patronize it, with obscure galleries to which the commonalty might penetrate.

"You must appeal to the intelligent classes," the college president told Brainard dogmatically.

"Where are they?" he asked caustically.

Thereafter he sat silent, and did not answer any of the comments made.

At this point Farson circulated the plans for the new theater, in order to create a diversion, if possible, and explained to a little group the design of the grandiose edifice. Here the banker, who prided himself on his knowledge of architecture, took a hand and condemned the plans severely as "mixed in style," "not indicative of the purpose of the building," and so on.

The sheets passed up and down the drawing-room, to which the party had adjourned, and were ogled by fine ladies with lorgnettes, until Brainard rose, and, bowing to his hostess, prepared to leave.

"It's so interesting, your plan, Mr. Brainard," Mrs. Pearmain gushed; "but I think you must modify some of your ideas. You must start from *above* always, and work *down*."

"Perhaps I shall, when I discover what is above," he retorted.

The secretary gathered up the plans, and over-

took Brainard in the hall. MacNaughton was already there. The old actor's face was very red; he had not said a single word all the afternoon, and his self-control was making him positively apoplectic. He stalked majestically past the footman, metaphorically shaking the dust of the milk-trust millions from his feet as he crossed the threshold.

"Asses, fools, imbeciles!" he cried, as the three reached the pavement. "What do *they* know about the drama? About anything but food and drink? They want us to build a theater for *them*!"

"Rather a frost, wasn't it, Ned?" Brainard observed, smiling humorously at the secretary.

Farson said nothing; he was too utterly depressed for words. The great social engagement on which he had counted so much had utterly missed fire, and he blamed himself for the fiasco. He should have written Brainard's remarks for him and rehearsed him carefully beforehand, thus guarding against the "bad breaks" that his employer had been guilty of. And yet he had not expected to encounter such stiff prejudice, such conservatism as took offense at trivialities, and stuck fast on some nonessential detail. But his experience with the "patron" class of society had not been large.

They walked back to Brainard's little house, and all the way the old Scotsman delivered himself of invective against the leisure class. Brainard remarked once :

"This is a democracy, so called ! Art is to be handed to the public on a gilt plate by the upper classes !"

He laughed sardonically.

When they entered the library, the fire was burning cheerily on the hearth. Brainard, taking the roll of plans from his secretary, glanced at the elaborate blueprints and water-color sketches of the palatial theater, which might be built for three millions. Slowly he poked the roll into the flames, and watched it burn until the last bit was licked up. His companions looked on in consternation.

"You are not going to give up ?" Farson asked.

"Not much !"

"I'm so sorry for this afternoon," the young man said apologetically. "How could one tell —"

"You couldn't ! I don't regret it. They taught me a lot — a whole lot," Brainard mused. "It was worth while for that. We shall learn all along the way, all of us." After another silence he roused himself suddenly, and said, with characteristic optimism and good humor : "There's been too much talk — let's get to work !

You, Mac, go ahead and engage the best company you can get together for love of art or of money. I will attend to building the theater. Farson can read those." He pointed whimsically at the pile of plays in the corner. "We'll let publicity take care of itself for a time."

V

It was very nearly a year from the day of the disastrous luncheon at Mrs. Pearmain's before the new theater was ready for rehearsal of the first play. The year, as Brainard had foreseen, had been replete with education, if nothing else. To find a suitable site for a popular playhouse, to erect thereon a pleasing building, commodious and attractive in design, and to engage a competent body of actors, would not seem a tremendous task. It had been done before; in fact, Messrs. Einstein & Flukeheimer, and their fellows, were doing it all the time. But the amateur with ideas and ideals was at a disadvantage.

Brainard had chosen the site, which was removed from the theater district but quite accessible — in fact, not far from the side street where he had once lodged. As the result of a large search he had discovered an architect who would devote himself to making a useful and suitable building instead of exploiting his patron's purse, and together they had worked over the plans until a satisfactory theater of modest proportions was evolved. It was decided to postpone the

starting of the Actors' College until the general scheme had established itself. Almost all the other features of Brainard's model playhouse for the people were included in the plans.

The site bought and the plans finished, Brainard thought that his difficulties in regard to the building were over, but in fact they had not yet begun. There was one strike after another upon the building from the excavation up, with an annoying regularity and persistence. They were usually ended by a compromise, which consisted in Brainard's paying a contractor a slight increase in contract price, to "square" some union or labor leader. MacNaughton, whose imagination was much given to plots and dire machinations of the enemy, held that these labor troubles emanated from the offices of Einstein & Flukeheimer in upper Broadway. Farson and Brainard tried to convince him of the folly of this delusion, telling him that the noted managers probably had enough troubles of their own to keep them busy, and indeed would doubtless be glad to give the People's Theater one of their own empty playhouses for a reasonable consideration if Brainard would take it off their hands. But they could not convince the Scotsman, who would go to Brainard's house at all hours with mysterious information about the plot, which had to be confided in deep

whispers. He had thought it all out in his own mind and believed that their hated rivals were working through the powerful agency of the Catholic Church. He said that was their favorite weapon when they wished to put any rival out of business or ruin a promising star, who had refused to listen to their offers.

When Brainard on his return from a hurried trip to Monument to inspect the mine found all work suspended upon the theater building, he was almost inclined to take Mac's view of the plot against the People's. This time it proved to be a dispute between two rival unions over the job of electric lighting. The contractor had given the work to the regular union, and the union of theatrical electricians had declared war. Every workman was called out. Brainard's patience was exhausted, and he would not listen to the usual proposal for compromise suggested by a suave "business agent." Instead he telegraphed his manager in Arizona to send up at once old Steve and the "emergency gang," — the name by which a choice collection of spirits under the command of the old miner Steve operated either as miners or strike breakers. On the third day they arrived, — twenty lean and lank specimens from the plains, in sombreros and riding boots, prepared for immediate action. They did not

know much about gas fitting, electric wiring, tile laying, and allied trades, but they took possession of the unfinished building with an unconcern that created a sensation in labor circles, and before long work had begun again and this time was pushed uninterruptedly towards a belated conclusion — all under the careful supervision of the “emergency gang,” who rolled cigarettes and spat upon the premises, while they discussed the drama with MacNaughton.

This prompt action by Brainard raised him highly in the esteem not only of the contractors and workmen, but of his associates in the venture. They saw that beneath his good nature and smiling placidity, he was a man to be reckoned with who meant to carry out his purposes. After this final flurry he took more pleasure in watching the work on the building, and thus realizing as far as the outside went his old dream. It would be, he flattered himself, the most delightful and convenient recreation center in the city, — not merely a garish, ugly auditorium where the largest number of unfortunates possible would be packed into the smallest area. . . . At last the building was sufficiently near completion to permit the beginning of rehearsals. . . .

On his way to the first general rehearsal Brainard stumbled over the marble workers, who were

laying the mosaic floors with what seemed incredible deliberation. At this rate, push the work as he might, the theater would be a rough barn on the night of its opening to the public, which had been announced for the first of December. It was easier to capture a fortune and develop a great mine than to build a playhouse in America! That gave him something to think of.

He dropped his coat and hat in the pleasant library on the second floor, where the carpenters were languidly putting up bookcases. He had watched these same carpenters at their work for a number of weeks and had marveled at their grudging slowness of movement. Certainly they were not touched with enthusiasm for the great Idea, although the philanthropic object of the building had been carefully explained to them. Some of these carpenters lived in the neighborhood, and the theater was designed to give pleasure to them and their wives and their children — it was to be their playhouse. And yet they seemingly took no more interest in it than they would in the Octopus Building farther down town, on which they would be employed next. Brainard himself had put much more than money into every detail of the place; he had given it loving thought and care, and he wished a beautiful product which should reflect that spirit in every line

and tone, — something intimate and lovely and human. But nothing of all this could he evoke in workman or contractor. It was all just “business,” to be skimped and shirked wherever possible. With a sigh from these reflections, thinking dubiously of the state of mind it betrayed in that “public,” on which he was counting so hopefully, he turned toward the stage. It gave him a thrill of real pleasure to push aside the heavy hangings and enter the mysterious darkness of the empty auditorium. At least this was real !

In the bare spaces of the undecorated stage, with a background of white brick wall, the new company was rehearsing *Lear*. It had been Brainard’s idea to open with what he considered to be the greatest play of the greatest English dramatist, — to be followed, he hoped, by a new American comedy. Thus the new company would pay their respects both to the past and to the future. Farson had tried to dissuade him from attempting *Lear*, saying lightly, — “You don’t want to queer us with the profession at the start.” But Brainard, whose first conscious interest in the drama had been aroused by a performance of *Lear* by the elder Salvini, which he had witnessed with his father in the hazy years of his youth, clung to his idea. Perhaps the part of Cordelia also touched his feeling for that lonely

girl, whose memory in some way this undertaking was to commemorate. And MacNaughton came to his support in the discussion with Farson, assuring him of the popular triumphs he had scored throughout the West in this masterpiece.

It was not until the parts were to be assigned that Brainard discovered the reason for the old actor's unshaken faith in the ability of the people to rise to *Lear*. He wished to play the title rôle himself, and had broken into tears when forced to yield to a more suitable actor. It had been a very painful incident, and also an enlightening one, to the inexperienced patron of the theater. . . .

At the moment of Brainard's arrival this morning, little Margaret Leroy, who, for the lack of a better actress, was their present leading lady, was languidly reciting Cordelia's lines :

No blown ambition doth our arms incite,
But love, dear love, and our aged father's rights,

In a few moments a voice with a beery tang boomed forth heavily into the dusky auditorium :

Aye, every inch a king ;
When I do stare, see how the subject quakes !

At this point Brainard had his first misgivings. Perhaps, with their present company, *Lear* was overambitious. It gave him a pang to real-

ize that the faded little Leroy, with her childish blond wig, was the best actress they could secure. She had had a quarrel with her manager at the opening of the season, because he wanted to send her to Omaha, in somebody else's last season's success, and had accepted the offer of the People's Theater in a fit of pique, and with obvious reluctance.

"It queers one so with the profession," she had told Farson confidentially.

She had insisted upon bringing along with her that ancient idol of the *matinée*, Dudley Warner. He was doing *Lear* in the style of *Beau Brummel*, in which he had made his last tour on the road.

As Brainard listened to the shrill pipings of Cordelia answered by Warner's beery bass, his heart sank. He recalled all the rebuffs he had received from the better players whom he had approached — their insincere and voluble sympathy, their flimsy excuses, and the selfish fears that kept them from offending Einstein & Flukeheimer, in spite of the generous salaries and all the other temptations Brainard could think of to win them to the cause of art.

"Maybe your gold mine will give out, or you will get tired of the stage," one well-known actress had said to him pertly. "Anyway, Einstein

has promised to put me on in one of Dudu Smith's plays, and that's good enough for me!"

The People's would have to do the best they could with second-rate and third-rate people until they had "made good," or could train their own actors, Brainard reflected. Meanwhile Miss Leroy continued to pipe and Dudley Warner to bawl, interrupted now and then by MacNaughton's resonant voice from the wings. "No, no! That won't do at all. Begin that once more, Miss Leroy," etc.

"Ah, it's rotten! Cut it out!" a voice murmured out of the darkness close to Brainard.

The fresh young voice so near to him startled Brainard, and he turned to see who had spoken. In the gloom he could make out a girl sitting hunched up, with crossed legs, a newspaper on her lap, from which she seemed to be eating her luncheon.

"It *is* pretty rotten," Brainard admitted.

"The whole bunch is no account trash, anyway," the young person continued impersonally, dangling a slice of sausage before her mouth. "Like last year's grass or yesterday's supper. But that Jenny! Why, she couldn't decorate a cemetery properly!"

Thereupon, having disposed of the company, the young woman devoted herself unreservedly

to her food, ignoring Brainard's presence. The next time that the stage manager opened a discussion with Miss Leroy that promised to last for some moments, Brainard turned to the girl.

"Pardon my curiosity," he said, taking the seat behind her, "but I should like to know how you happen to be here at the rehearsal."

"Me? Why, I belong!" she replied, with a funny wrinkling of her small lips. "I'm part of it — this great uplift movement for the American drá-ma!"

Brainard winced at the gibe.

"Is that what they call us?"

"And a lot of other things," the young woman admitted frankly. "Highbrows and amateurs and boneheads and —"

"I don't know *you*, and I thought I had met every one in the company."

"I'm not in the front row, you see. I am what they call a nee-o-phyte — a pupil in the Actors' College, when there is any college."

"Oh, I remember now!" Brainard said, recalling the first and only pupil enrolled. "Your name is —"

"Delacourt — Louisiana Delacourt," the girl rolled out with gusto, as if she enjoyed her name, and hadn't many opportunities of using it.

The slightly Southern accent of the girl set

puzzling currents of memory at work in Brainard's mind. He looked at her more closely, but in the dim light of the auditorium could not make out distinctly the face which was shrouded in one of the inverted "peach-basket" hats of the period. She seemed a slight little body.

"Say," Miss Delacourt remarked confidentially, "I bet I could show that wiggle-tailed Flossie a stunt or two!"

"Do you know *Lear*?"

"Do I know *Lear*? I was nursed on Shakespeare. My mother knew the plays by heart, and used to recite 'em all over. Mr. Farson says he'll get me a boy's part in the last act. Five lines — but you'll see how I'll make 'em hum!"

Just then Farson came up to them out of the darkness of the auditorium, and nodded to the girl, who presently slipped off.

"So you know Miss Delacourt?" Brainard observed.

"Of course! Everybody about the place knows Louisiana. Queer little piece, isn't she? Slangy and fresh, but she knows how to handle herself. . . . It's pretty rotten!" he remarked cheerfully, glancing at the stage.

"Just what Louisiana said."

"I guess she knows!"

Brainard and the secretary thereupon went out to lunch, and tried to forget their troubles.

VI

At last, amid turmoil and excitement, the opening day came. Brainard and Farson had been at the theater since early morning, doing what they could to bring order out of chaos. About lunch time MacNaughton rushed up to them, his face white with excitement.

"A telegram from Miss Leroy!" he gasped. "Doctor thinks she's got appendicitis. She's got Einsteinitis, all right, — that's what is the matter with her! We can't raise an actress in New York who knows Cordelia's lines, let alone having rehearsed it. We'll have to postpone the opening!"

"Not that!" Brainard said, with tightening lips. "Not if you read the lines, Mac!" The old actor stormed back and forth, snapping his fingers and cursing with equal warmth stars and managers, the stage and life.

"Isn't there some one in the company who could take the part?" Brainard asked.

"Not one, man or woman!" the Scotsman growled. "We're using the whole company."

"Where's Louisiana?" Farson inquired, a little smile wreathing his lips.

"You mean that Kansas kid? She's knocking about the stage somewhere," MacNaughton replied. He had had several passages with Miss Delacourt already, and had no great opinion of her ability except in repartee. "You aren't thinking of that child?"

"Let's find her," Farson said. "She knows Shakespeare by heart — her mother used to put her to sleep on it — she's always getting it off when she isn't ragging the show with her Kansas slang."

They found Louisiana sitting on a pile of properties, playing with a lanky pup. She smiled on Farson in a friendly fashion, and ignored the manager.

"Say, what's broken down now?" she drawled. "Have Miss Leroy's stays given warning, or did the big bass fiddle bust a string?"

"Look here, Miss Louisiana," Farson replied. "Quit your guying, and get ready for Cordelia. We'll rehearse you all the afternoon."

"Gee whiz!" the young woman remarked, rising and yanking the puppy by the leash. "But you're sudden, my dear!"

"Miss Leroy is sick — going to have an operation."

"She needed it, if ever a woman did!" Miss Delacourt tossed back over her shoulder as she tied the puppy to the gilded throne.

"She'll do!" Farson whispered encouragingly.

"She'll do something," MacNaughton growled gloomily.

It was not an auspicious outlook for the opening of the People's Theater.

At eight o'clock that evening, the new playhouse was fairly well filled with what the local press calls a "highbrow audience." Of these, not a few had come to scoff, for from the beginning the newspapers, led by the *Beacon*, had taken the People's Theater as a pet toy with which to play during the silly season. It was variously described as the "Sulfur Extravaganza," the "Cowboy Show," or the "Arizona Théâtre Français."

For ever since that fatal luncheon, the editor of the *Beacon* had directed the most skillful members of his celebrated stiletto gang in their sneers at Brainard. To the New York newspaper mind it was simply inconceivable that a man with a great fortune could put it to so purely childish a use as running a popular theater. A few friendly souls, however, were scattered up and down the house — those who follow the banner of "new ideas" wherever it may wave; and there were a few of the "people" — a very few — on free tickets.

As the curtains slowly parted, Brainard, sitting alone in the rear of the house, regretted more than

ever that they had attempted to open with *Lear*. There were surely some in the audience whose memories, like his, would carry them back to the godlike fury of the elder Salvini. What could they make of the squat figure, the perspiring muscularity of Dudley Warner?

As the fated king waddled forth and began, Brainard shut his eyes. He opened them suddenly on hearing:

What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent.

It was Louisiana in walk and bearing, — the swagger from Iole, Kansas, — but the voice was rich and sweet, with an unpremeditated, girlish modulation that suggested depths of feeling unsuspected.

The audience, puzzled, was respectful through Cordelia's humble replies, until the young actress essayed her first long speech:

You have begot me, bred me, loved me; I
Return those duties back as are right fit . . .
Haply when I shall wed,
That lord must take my—my—

Louisiana stumbled at the word, then brought out triumphantly:

My fist—

There was a ripple of amusement. Miss Delacourt heard it, flushed defiance in an un-Cordelia-

like manner, and tore through the concluding lines. She got on well enough in the short responses, but the critics were waiting — as was Brainard, with trepidation — to see what the girl would make of her next long speech.

Alas! Miss Louisiana sailed in, as she would have said, to paint the lines. She drew herself up in all her girlish dignity.

I yet beseech your majesty,
If for I want that glib and oily part
To speak and purpose not; since what I well
intend
I'll do't before I speak — that you make
known —

A frightened look came over the girl's face.

"She is rattled," Brainard said to himself, "and will break!"

Evidently the audience thought so, too, and there was a painful hush, in which MacNaughton's efforts to whisper the words from the side could be heard.

"It is no — no — oh, hang it all, how does the talk go?" Louisiana muttered audibly, swinging on her heel toward the wings.

There was a roar of laughter from the house. With one contemptuous glance at the audience, Cordelia walked deliberately into the wings, and, returning in fierce haste, finished her speech. As

she made her exit at the end of the scene, she jerked the train of her dress and gave it a kick in good vaudeville style. The galleries caught fire, and began to stamp and hoot. Louisiana turned and distinctly made a face, as a child might, at her tormentors. The applause was furious. It lasted so long that to resume the play with any degree of seriousness seemed utterly impossible.

At the end of the act, the manager pushed the unwilling Cordelia out upon the stage. She made a sulky little bow and another face. There were calls and whistles. She was a hit. But *Lear!*

Brainard, laughing in spite of himself, bit his lips with mortification. After this nothing could bring the audience to take the performance seriously. The galleries began to guy Warner, and to exchange repartee with the fool.

Fortunately, Cordelia did not appear during the next two acts. When she came on at the conclusion of the fourth act, for the affecting scene with the blind king, the gallery received her uproariously. She was white, with set lips, and she threw herself into her lines with a fine scorn of the mirthful house. When her memory failed her, she cut or improvised with fluent inspiration.

"She's acting!" Farson whispered in amazement to Brainard.

"Yes, she's acting, but they don't know it!"

For the house, having amused itself once with Miss Delacourt, refused to take her seriously, and was ready to explode with derisive mirth at any unconventional gesture, any wrong accent. Poor Louisiana gave them enough openings; but she held herself steadily, and was winning her way with the sweetness of her voice and her real charm, when, alas, there came a long, hard line. She wavered, tried to bluff it out, but broke down, burst into tears, and fled to the wings.

"Poor child! It was too much for her," Brainard murmured, while Farson tried to hiss down the laughter.

It would not down, however. Finally Brainard rose and walked down the aisle to the front. Holding up his hand to still the noise, he said:

"Miss Delacourt came to us merely as a pupil. We were compelled to ask her to take the difficult rôle of Cordelia at five hours' notice, owing to the sudden illness of Miss Leroy. I think that Miss Delacourt deserves our thanks and our sympathy, instead of these jeers."

There was silence, but *Lear* was doomed. The critics had left, and others followed. Those that stayed until the curtain swept together for the last time snickered contemptuously over the affair. Louisiana had saved the occasion from dismal dullness; she had turned *Lear* into a farce!

VII

THE pleasant drawing-room and the library of the theater, which were on the second floor above the foyer, had been thrown open after the performance, and a few well-wishers of the enterprise lingered there to examine the new playhouse and to meet the shamefaced members of the company, to whom Brainard was giving a supper. Miss Delacourt did not appear with the others.

"She's probably gone home, poor girl," Farson said, as Brainard started to find her. He went directly to the dressing rooms and knocked at one of the closed doors. He had to knock twice before a sulky voice replied irritably:

"Well, come in!"

Louisiana had torn off the blond wig in which she had played Cordelia and tossed it into a corner. She had also removed the embroidered gold bodice of her costume and put on a rumpled dressing sack, and was sitting curled up on her long train, the big puppy in her lap. She was pulling his ears; her brown hair fell about his head. It was plain that she had been crying.

"What do you want?" she asked crossly, recognizing Brainard.

"I came to—to thank you for helping us in our emergency this evening," Brainard stammered.

"Helping! That's a smooth word, I must say!" the girl flashed. "You may like that sort of help; but it's the last you'll get from me, I reckon!"

"I hope not," Brainard protested heartily. "You saved the performance from being just a soggy failure, anyway."

He could not help smiling at the memory of her saucy antics, yet the picture of childish despair she presented, crumpled, with her hair falling about the puppy's head, roused another unfamiliar feeling of sympathy and pity. She was such a forlorn little person, for all the bravado of her speech!

"Is that what you call saving it?" Louisiana turned the puppy from her lap and devoted all her passion to scorn. "Saving! To make yourself a guy, to be 'it' for the merry haw-haws of the smart Alecks in New York! I must say I don't like your taste. I'd rather fail in some other way." She pushed back her falling hair and tied it excitedly in a knot, then shrank into her dressing gown and glared at Brainard very much like a kitten that has been cornered and is ruffled. "Let

me tell you right here, dear sir, if you are the big gun responsible for this whole show, you haven't got much to be proud of!"

"I heard you say that once before," Brainard admitted humbly. "You said it was rotten, and I guess it is. But we are going to try to make it better."

"Yes, try! You'd better try. I haven't seen much acting, but I've seen road shows in one-horse towns back in the State of Kansas that could play all over your swell outfit. You think you are uplifting the theater, do you? What do you know about the theater, anyway? You'd better go right out to Iole, or over in the Bowery, and look at a ten-twenty-thirty show and learn something about play-acting. This young ladies' boarding-school sissy show — oh, why did I ever come to you? I'd have learned more in a Kansas City variety!"

She crossed the room to hunt up a cigarette, and puffed the smoke with a disdainful shrug of her thin shoulders, walking to and fro in the small dressing room, kicking her dress about like a football, and generally emitting sparks.

"So I saved your show from being too awfully dull — at the expense of my reputation!"

Brainard could not help laughing at this display of childish vanity. She was a child attempting

to be dignified with something more than a child's intelligence. He suppressed his laughter and let her emotion explode.

"What do you think those writer-guys in the front row are going to say about Louisiana Delacourt to-morrow morning? They'll hand me the merry laugh, that's all. I'll be a deader in the profession after this. Anyway, I'll have to make up another name."

"Your name wasn't on the program, you know," Brainard suggested soothingly. Louisiana merely cast him a withering glance. "Of course, our company isn't what it should be yet," he admitted. "We'll try to give you a better chance —"

"You'll have to do some mighty smart trying," the girl sneered fiercely. "You highbrows think all you've got to do is to open a theater and print 'Ideals' in big letters on the program, and the public will run to your show. Folks have been going to the theater some before you undertook to uplift it!"

"Do you think they do good work at the other theaters?"

"They ain't all they might be, perhaps, but they're so much more in the game than you are, Mr. Head-in-the-Clouds, that you can't see 'em at all, at all! And to start off with Shakespeare, of course!"

She sniffed outrageously.

"*Lear* was a mistake."

"I should say it was!" she agreed with infinite sarcasm. "Why don't you look around and see what the others are doing — what the horrid trust is putting on? They know their business, anyway."

"Oh, come — you are a little hard on us!"

"I mean it. . . . Now, if you don't mind stepping along, I'm going to shake off this meal sack and hike home to bed. Good-by to high art for me, thank you!"

Brainard started for the door on this broad hint, but paused with his hand on the knob.

"Miss Delacourt," he said, facing the angry girl, "I came here to-night to say to you what I sincerely believe — that you have in you the making of a fine actress. I gather from what you have said about our undertaking that my opinion means nothing to you. But let me assure you that I didn't see your mistakes to-night as much as the spirit and the talent — the very great talent, if I am not mistaken."

"Very kind of you, I am sure," the girl snapped.

"I don't wish to persuade you to stay with us against your inclination. In our present shape, we can't give you what you need."

"I should think not!"

"One of my purposes, however, in this enterprise was to discover just such talent as I think you have, and develop it. Perhaps, if I can't help you in one way to develop your talent, I can in another."

Miss Delacourt deigned to pause in her toilette to stare at Brainard.

"I'm sure you have the real thing in you, even after this one unfortunate performance. I can't tell whether the vein will hold deep, whether you have the character to develop it thoroughly, or will be content with the superficial success you might easily achieve in one of the commercial theaters. But I want to help you to do better than that — to give your talent a chance."

"Well?"

"You must go where you can study — where you can see good acting also. You must go abroad — to England and France and Germany."

The girl's eyes opened wider and wider. She murmured:

"But that would take a sight of time and money, and I haven't a cent in the world!"

"You have the time, at your age, and I can give you all the money you need," he went on earnestly. "To-morrow Mr. Farson and I will talk the matter over with you and decide on what's the best way to go about it."

Louisiana threw back her head, as if to embrace the splendid vision opened before her. Still gazing at Brainard to see whether he really meant it all, or was perpetrating a cruel joke, she gave a long sigh. There was something pathetically wistful and desirous in her small face that stirred Brainard strongly. He seemed to be looking into a little starved soul that was trying to grasp the meaning of his promise.

“You don’t mean —”

She began and stopped. Her look wavered for one moment, as if an unpleasant idea had crossed her mind and made her doubt Brainard’s disinterestedness. Brainard understood the expression. Probably in her short experience of life she had met with little real generosity from men.

“I mean exactly what I said — and nothing more!” he added with meaning emphasis.

The girl’s face cleared with wonderful rapidity. Once more it had the eager, wistful expression of the child.

“My, but you are a good one!” she exclaimed at last, convinced of his earnestness and his singleness of purpose. “After all those fancy compliments I just passed you, too!”

“I guess we deserved a good part of what you said. Perhaps you’ll save the day for us again sometime — when you come back.”

"I sure hope I can ! But not that way !" she blushed. "You mean it all — the study and travel ? To go to Paris ?"

"And London and Berlin and Vienna," Brainard added with a smile. "And a lot of hard work, too, remember !"

"That never rattled me !" Louisiana exclaimed, gathering the sleepy pup into her arms and hugging him until he yelped. Presently she held out a hand to Brainard with an expression on her mobile face more mature than he had yet seen there. "Some day I'll tell you my story, and then you'll see what it means to me. You've given me — life !"

He left her hastily to spare her the embarrassment of a second fit of tears. In spite of all the humiliation that the evening had brought him, Brainard returned to his house in a happy and contented frame of mind.

VIII

WHEN Brainard confided to Farson the plan he had formed for Louisiana Delacourt's education, the younger man looked sharply at him for one moment as if he also suspected ulterior motives in this unexpected interest in the young woman, who had given the People's Theater such dubious notoriety by her performance of Cordelia. In that rapid interchange of glances between the two men, Brainard felt for the first time a slight antagonism to his cheerful and companionable secretary. Why should Farson immediately infer that there was anything more than a disinterested desire on his part to help a poor and promising girl, whom fate had rather casually thrown in his path? Was it necessary that in the theater world this should inevitably be the implication, — that there could be no simple kindness between men and women!

"No!" he exclaimed, with a slight smile, answering Farson's glance, "I don't mean that!"

"Why do you think that it would be a good thing for Louisiana to go abroad now? She's got

a good deal to learn that she could learn here just as well," the secretary observed evasively.

Brainard smiled more openly. It was plain enough that the young secretary did not like the idea of losing sight of their Kansas star, of whom he had seen a good deal in the course of business these last months.

"She's nothing but a kid, you know," he added in an indifferent tone.

"Exactly! And it's just because she is so much of a child that I think the best thing for her is to have a lot of new experience of a totally different kind from any she's likely to get over here. What she wants is to grow, — not learn grammar and elocution. She must develop in every way to become the actress that is in her, and that development she will get more easily somewhere out of her old environment — apart from all the inspiration that will come to her eager little mind by seeing real acting and real plays, of which there is much more just at present in Europe than in New York."

"I see you have thought it all out," the secretary replied dryly.

"Yes, I have thought a good deal about Louisiana since last night," Brainard admitted.

It had occurred to him possibly in the course of this thought that the secretary's growing inti-

macy with the girl was not altogether advantageous. His nature was too generous, however, to entertain this consideration seriously. The idea of rivalry between them for the girl's interest was too ridiculous to be thought of, and yet he was forced to recognize in himself a trace of that subtle sex jealousy that seems inevitable wherever two men are concerned with one woman, no matter how trivial the occasion. He put it summarily out of his head.

"She won't be away for always, Ned," he observed good-naturedly. "And we must give the girl her chance — it's the least we can do after encouraging her to come on here and join our organization, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," the secretary agreed more cordially.

When Brainard told MacNaughton of his purpose, the old actor expressed an unfeigned and unflattering surprise.

"What do you want to turn that silly's little head for?" he roared, flourishing his cigar. "Send her abroad to study! You'd much better send her to a grammar school or a young lady's fem sem where she could learn ordinary deportment. She'll never make an actress."

"I don't agree with you," Brainard replied quickly. "She's the best we've got already."

Farson watched the two with an amused smile. The old actor shrugged his shoulders in mute disgust.

"It isn't saying much either," the patron of the People's Theater continued somewhat tartly. "Cordelia wasn't the worst that happened last night by any means."

"My God!" the Scotsman groaned fervently. "I hope nothing as bad will ever happen to me again in this life."

Brainard's doubts of MacNaughton's fitness for his position of manager grew rapidly from this moment into a conviction that eventually produced difficulties in the hitherto harmonious management of the theatrical enterprise. Another disturbing current set in motion by the young person from Iole, Kansas!

Brainard and Farson discussed at some length the details of Louisiana's trip. The secretary was firmly convinced that some sort of chaperone should be provided for the girl. She needed a duenna or guardian, he said, to keep her out of scrapes, if ever a woman did. When this idea was suggested to Miss Delacourt, it received an immediate and positive discouragement.

"I don't know any female whom I could endure to have trailing around after me," she said. "And what's the use, anyhow? They won't eat me up

over there, I reckon. I've always managed to look out for myself so far, and I'm not likely to forget how now I've something worth doing to keep me busy. . . . No, I'll go it alone, thank you, or not at all until I'm ready to select my own guardian."

With this she cast Farson a belligerent look that delighted Brainard. When the secretary tried to explain in circumspect terms the manifold dangers to which a young woman traveling alone was necessarily exposed, she said :

"I'm going to take the pup along. A good dog is worth any two chaperones in case of trouble."

Brainard observed finally :

"I think Miss Delacourt is right. She will get on very well anywhere by herself. She has the habit of independence."

"You see !" the young woman remarked, nodding loftily to Farson. "You are too conventional for the theater. I have the habit of perfect independence, as your boss said. And I don't propose to give it up in a hurry either."

With this second jab at the secretary she squeezed her dog in an ecstasy of good spirits.

This important question being settled, there remained merely the plan of work and travel, which Brainard undertook to prepare and to

which he gave much careful consideration. Then the passage was engaged, and the morning of the sailing the three had a pleasant breakfast together at a little down-town restaurant. Louisiana appeared in what she called "the proper make-up for her new part," — a smart traveling costume, with fresh hat, gloves, boots, and parasol. Brainard was glad to see that she had made such an immediate and natural use of the liberal means he had placed at her disposal through his secretary, although the transformation worked by her new costume took away a certain quality of primitive girlishness that was pleasant to him. Louisiana was emerging rapidly from her chrysalis under the stimulus of the opportunity he had provided for her. As he sat back and watched her spar with Farson, he wondered whether the old Louisiana would ever return from Europe. What sort of woman would take the place of the girl who had made her *début* in the most unconventional Cordelia the English stage had ever seen?

At any rate everything was spontaneous in her now, — not a trace of self-consciousness in her attitude to him as her benefactor, and all the simplicity and directness of the child which had first touched him.

"He says he's going to write a piece for the theater and put *me* in," Louisiana remarked turn-

ing to Brainard. "He'd better let me see it first — I'll give him a few points most men writers overlook. . . . You'll keep the theater open until I get back?"

"Longer than that, we hope!" Brainard laughed.

"I want to make my *début* there — my real *début*," she said importantly.

"I promise you we'll keep it open for that!"

"You'd better fire the whole bunch and start over," she observed thoughtfully. . . .

At the last moment, when Farson had already gone down the gangway, the girl drew Brainard to one side and uttered the first serious words they had had since their talk in her dressing room the night of *Lear*.

"It's no use saying thanks, you know!"

"I don't want you to thank me."

"I know you don't and I'm not — but I want you to know I understand."

"What?"

"What you're doing for me. . . . I'll make good."

"I believe you will!"

"Good-by!"

She gave him a lean little hand that gripped his nervously. The last he saw of Louisiana Delacourt as he went over the ship's side, she was

chasing her dog into some stranger's deck cabin. As he made his way from the dock towards the People's Theater that morning, his world seemed less gay and amusing with Louisiana out of it.

IX

AFTER the inglorious failure of *Lear*, they tried *She Stoops to Conquer*, with Cecilia Pyce, an English actress of advancing years and a large and bony physique, whom MacNaughton much vaunted. Brainard suspected that Cissie, as Mac called her, had been the Scotsman's sweetheart in her palmier days, and thus he was now paying his sentimental debts by giving her a lucrative position at his patron's expense. However, nothing better offered at present, and Miss Pyce at least knew how to act in the solid old English fashion. The people came sparingly, and sat in the first four rows of the big auditorium, which was a lonesome sort of place these days.

It was little better when the company essayed an "original American play" — as it was advertised — that Farson had culled from the mass of manuscripts he had examined. *May Magic* lasted a week, and then fell to pieces before an audience consisting of the author and about twenty of his friends. The management could not even give their tickets away. At *May*

Magic the critics took final leave of the People's Theater with such parting kicks as this :

What in the name of common sense is the amateurish aggregation at the so-called People's Theater trying to do? In what sense is it a popular theater? The "people" are conspicuous by their absence. The worthy gentleman who is spending his money giving the public fifth-rate productions of English classics and such rejected modern masterpieces as *May Magic* had better go over to Broadway and learn his trade.

Brainard was thankful that Louisiana was safe on the high seas on her way to Munich, and would not see this article !

Somewhere Farson ran across a statuesque young woman of German extraction who spoke English as if she had a cracker in her mouth, and became persuaded that the mission of their organization was to introduce to the American public the new plays of the advanced European theater.

"We must become the theater of ideas," he said to Brainard.

So, with the assistance of Miss Beatrice Klinker in leading rôles, the People's Theater became frankly "highbrow" and went after Brioux, Hauptmann, Strindberg, and the tribe of the peculiar. Brainard poured out money like water in buying rights at exorbitant prices, in preparing new scenery, and in expensive additions to the com-

pany. He foresaw that at this rate, instead of starting a chain of popular theaters across the continent, he would have all he could do to maintain one organization in New York, with possibly a couple of road companies. For the receipts were always negligible. To such comparatively modest limits had his great Idea already shrunk. If he had not thus far succeeded in enlightening any large section of the American Public in dramatic art, he himself had received a very thorough and costly lesson, not merely in the drama, but in human nature and life. That, however, had not been his purpose !

It was not until the People's Theater produced an erotic piece by a new Danish writer, whose name was unknown to the critics, that the house began to fill.

"We've struck our pace!" Farson declared jubilantly. He exercised all his journalistic ingenuity in whetting the appetite of the New York public for the play with immediate results in the box office. Brainard, although he had no high opinion of the play, felt relieved not to encounter at each performance the same dreary waste of empty seats. He comforted himself with the thought that if the Public could be induced to come to a "sex play," they might be captured for less hectic entertainments. MacNaughton and

Farson, with the easy sophistry of the theater, maintained that what people cared to see must be good art and stoutly defended the Danish piece.

But their good luck did not hold. At the Saturday matinée of the first week the police visited the theater and the curtain was ordered down after the bedroom scene in the second act. There was a mild demonstration among the audience, whose curiosity was defeated, and the price of their tickets was repaid to all who demanded it. The press made considerable noise over the event.

"We're made!" MacNaughton announced in great excitement. Farson was busy with the reporters, trying to get the most out of this unexpected bit of publicity. Brainard set forth in search of the virtuous police commissioner to protest in the name of outraged Art. But the commissioner was impervious to Art.

"That sort of show don't go in New York," he pronounced austerely, in reply to Brainard's argument that the play had been given even more boldly in Vienna and Berlin and was held to be a "moral document" by the best European critics. The police commissioner seemed to think that New York had a different and better morality than that obtaining in Europe. He was obdurate. When Brainard reported his failure to his associates, Farson took it very lightly.

"All we'll have to do," he suggested, "is to make some slight changes — put a screen in front of the bed scene — and see the inspector. I'll take care of him."

But Brainard refused to pay the police to be allowed to produce his play, and so on Monday night the People's Theater remained dark.

"And just look at all that money!" MacNaughton wailed, as something of a crowd began to form in front of the theater for the first time. "The governor is a miserable puritan," he said to Farsen, wringing his hands. "To think of turning his back on his luck just because of the morality of the New York police! He ought to run a Sunday school."

Brainard was not to be moved, although the theater would have to remain closed for a week until the company could prepare another play. He was deeply disgusted with the whole affair, with the notoriety as well as the cheap pretense of morality by the police commissioner. For the first time in four years his faith in the great Idea began to waver, and he longed to escape from New York to the more vital air of Arizona. There had been some difficulty recently with the pumps at the Melody mine, and he might well take this opportunity of running down to Monument. Once there it would be a temptation to abandon

the great Idea altogether and to remain in the mountains developing the copper mine. Or he could buy a coffee plantation in Jalapa, as he had once fleetingly thought of doing, and settle himself in Mexico like a medieval prince. Possibly the little señorita Marie had not yet found another Prince and had waited all these years for his expected return. The vision of that beautiful semi-tropical valley dominated by the snowy crown of the old volcano returned to his memory with alluring colors. Life in such a far-off Eden with a gentle creature as mistress of a rose-covered hacienda was an inviting contrast to the glare and vulgarity of New York. . . .

Brainard and the secretary left the theater in glum silence, each possessed by an unhappy train of thought. On their way uptown they passed a billboard on which some flaming posters displayed certain tempting scenes from a soul-and-body-stirring play called *The Stolen Bonds*, now being given for the first time in New York. Brainard paused before the gaudy billboard.

"What the public really likes!" Farson commented with a grin.

Brainard remembered Louisiana's angry taunt, — "Go and see a good melodrama — see what folks are willing to pay real money for!"

"Let's take it in!" he exclaimed, seizing his

companion's arm. "We haven't anything else to do this evening."

"We'll get all the goods before we reach the show," the secretary observed, pointing to another series of immense posters that represented a gloomy bank vault in which a masked gentleman was holding a lantern above the prostrate form of a woman. "They're not afraid of giving away their story!"

"Perhaps we shall find the great American play we have been hunting for all this year," Brainard replied, as they came into the garish foyer of the theater. At one side was the entrance to a brilliant saloon, which seemed part of the establishment. "Democratic and convivial this," he joked, thinking of the dainty "tea room" at the People's.

There were only box seats left. When the two pushed aside the plush curtains that concealed these luxurious retreats, the curtain was up and the first act had started before a house packed with prosperous-looking citizens and their women.

"Not a dead seat in the house, I'll bet!" whispered the secretary.

The scene represented the inside of an office, with a large safe at one side. The short, black-haired heroine was striving ineffectually to bar the way of a brawny villain, who had her covered with a re-

volver in one hand, and with the other whipped an ether cone from an inner pocket. She was rapidly crowded into the vault, where she succumbed in due time, after a muscular struggle and curdling shrieks, to the ether cone. Thereupon the burglar set busily to work to fill an enormous sample case with piles of yellow currency and bundles conveniently labeled BONDS, in large letters, so that a child might read. The villain then departed, carefully locking the door of the safe upon the etherized heroine.

But the villain had reckoned without the telephone. In the next scene the stenographer-heroine slowly grabbed the ether cone from her face, gaspingly crawled to the corner, where the telephone hung conspicuously, and called Central. Presently the bolts began to grumble, and were shot back by a young man who rushed in and dragged the tottering woman from the safe, while she murmured in a dying whisper audible for two blocks :

“The ferry, Jasper ! The ferry ! The thief !”

Then the noble girl fell swooning and apparently lifeless.

“There’s something doing !” Farson remarked with an appreciative grin, and added with a peculiar expression, “They’ve taken more than a hint from my one play.”

"And several more from life," Brainard muttered.

"I believe it *is* life through the medium of my play — but altered somehow," Farson observed.

"Oh ! much altered !"

The next scene was labeled, "AT THE FERRY SLIP — SAN FRANCISCO." As the curtain rose, the villain — no longer masked, but with a long ulster concealing all but his sinister eyes — was deftly transferring himself and his sample case, stuffed with money and bonds, on board the ferry-boat. The bell rang — business in the wings. Then on rushed the hero-lover, clutching vainly at the disappearing sample case. There was a desperate tussle between the hero and the villain, while the dummy passengers on the deck above obligingly turned their backs. The villain cut loose from his pursuer with a wicked knife, threw the case upon the moving boat, and leaped two yards after it, leaving the prostrate figure of the hero-lover half dropping over the slip. The stenographer-heroine appeared — in a neat traveling suit — and pulled her lover safely ashore. Curtain.

"Bravo !" Farson shouted enthusiastically. "If it isn't exactly life, it's the way we'd all like to have it happen, anyway."

"It may be nearer life than you think," Brain-

ard assented with a queer smile. In this scene he had been able to get a good view of the heroine of the piece. Beneath the coarse make-up he thought he recognized familiar features, and felt sure that he had heard in real life that pert, nasal voice which had just uttered the last speech — “Escaped! We’ll track him into the darkest wilds of Africa!”

“Recognize a friend?” Farson inquired. Brainard nodded. They turned over the leaves of their program to find the name of the heroine. It was Lorilla Walters, in large black type.

“Lorilla,” Farson murmured. “Good stage name.”

“It sounds like her!” Brainard agreed.

Just then the curtain went up for the third act. Here was a rapid succession of scenes representing the pursuit and escape of the villain in the Arizona desert, with one very lurid background of flaming mountains and sagebrush plain. Pistol shots and a chase through an adobe hacienda outside a Mexican village concluded the act.

“Whew, these people have wire nerves!” Farson commented, wiping his brow.

“They have treated the story rather freely,” Brainard remarked grimly. Farson talked nervously.

“Louisiana would like that!” he said. “There’s

something doing all the time. I bet that's Lorilla. What do you say to trying her at the People's? She's a trifle broad in her methods, but sound — and lets herself go all the time. It's just a bit loud in tone."

"Not louder than life sometimes."

"It carries home — look at the audience!"

In the fourth act the villain was at last cornered by the stenographer-heroine and the hero-lover, aided by a United States cruiser, which intercepted the villain and his sample case as they were about to sail away from the port of Vera Cruz on a Spanish steamer. The captain of the steamer on which the villain had taken refuge with his sample case blasphemously defied the flag of the United States with loud curses. But a booming shot from the wings knocked his smokestack out of service, and brought him to his senses. The captain thereafter gracefully received the smart American lieutenant who came aboard in holiday uniform and collared the villain, denounced by the heroine, as he cowered behind the fallen smokestack — still wearing the long ulster.

They applauded vigorously and were about to drift out with the crowd of candy-eating females and their escorts, when the curtains of the box were parted by a gentleman in evening clothes, who stood smiling, holding his spotless silk hat

in one hand and extending the other to Brainard.

"Hello!" the stranger said easily, as if he were greeting a casual acquaintance whom he had not seen for several days. He came forward into the box, and sat on the edge of a chair, dangling his glossy silk hat. "Saw you from behind," he added, smiling slightly upon Brainard, whose surprise was evident.

"You, Hollinger!" the latter exclaimed, recovering himself. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, in the show business, — same as you," he added with a little laugh.

"The last time I saw you —"

"Was in that Jalapa hotel where I had the pleasure of delivering a little lecture on life for your benefit," the fight-trust man supplied. "You profited by it at once — that very night, if I remember rightly. Rarely does a teacher of morals get such a rapid reaction!"

"Yes!" Brainard laughed. "Necessity pointed the moral to your talk with a kick. I left on a mule car, and got away just in time."

"So Calloway told me the next morning. We tried to keep your friends interested in Jalapa until the boat sailed. I take it that we succeeded."

"Yes, I owe you a great deal for that good turn."

"Don't mention it," Hollinger murmured, slip-

ping into the chair, "always ready to serve a friend."

Brainard introduced Farson, who knew the "king of the prize ring trust" by sight, for Hollinger had been a celebrated figure on the Coast in the days before the graft trials. The three chatted for a time while the auditorium emptied.

"How did you like our play?" he inquired casually.

"Your play! It's suspiciously like mine."

"Perhaps we drew from the same sources."

"How did you get into the theatrical business?" Brainard inquired.

"I got into it in a rather roundabout way," the fight-trust magnate explained. "You remember the event at Jalapa? The American papers were full of it at the time. I was interested in the moving picture concession for the States. We expected to make big money out of it. But they had another spasm of virtue in this country about that time, and we were shut out of the best circuits. So from the movies I got into vaudeville and then into the regular show business. Have a couple of circuits on the Coast and interests in the East also. This is one of my companies. They've done a tremendous business out West in this thing — did it appeal to you?"

He smiled genially at Brainard, and added:

"We couldn't work in the hacienda scene, — roses, moonlight, Orizaba, pretty Mexican girl, and the rest, — it took too much scenery."

"We thought it was a trifle overdrawn," Brainard observed.

"Oh, the theater demands that, you know, — exaggeration. Art is never quite like nature. Even Milton threw it on thick at times, if I recollect. . . . But it stirs the blood — that's what you want in these dull times. People come to the theater to feel, their lives are so dull. That's the first thing I learned in the show business. Give the public something to tease the nerves, keep 'em on the jump. And the second thing I learned was that you must always hold up a high moral standard. It never pays in the long run to cater to the small class that can afford to think about morals as freely as they act." He looked at Brainard meaningly. "I saw your show last week," he explained. "It's not really tough, but it don't pay to do that sort of thing. Most people, of course, are not half as good as they like to think they are. But even the worst want their art and literature better than they know they are and better than they think their neighbors are. That's the way they square themselves with life," he concluded sententiously.

This was the second time, Brainard reflected,

that he had received a valuable lesson in ethics from the fight-trust magnate. He understood now why Hollinger had been reading Milton when he first made his acquaintance on the Overland Limited. He was a business philosopher.

"If you are going to deal with people," he added gently, "you must know how they act and feel about things."

"I suppose that is why you let the heroine capture the thief in this piece?" Brainard remarked.

"Precisely! The clever young dramatist who knocked the thing together for me was all for another ending, a more convincing one, perhaps, where the heroine was bought off for a good share of the bonds and currency. But although admitting the truth of his reasoning, I could not permit him to ruin the success of our play. We were compelled to violate nature again, and in deference to the public's unquenchable thirst for Virtue we allowed the slow-moving heroine to accomplish the dire purpose of her vengeful passions with the assistance of the government. In its present form our play is terribly satisfying to our public. It gratifies especially that common human desire to get somebody. Half our criminal justice is built upon the same unpleasant trait of human nature. . . . By the way," he remarked, interrupting the flow of his philosophical analysis, "I almost forgot!

There's a friend of yours in behind who wants to see you. I promised to bring you back. You've no objections?"

"None at all!" Brainard laughed. "You see our encounter didn't turn out quite like the play, fortunately for me!"

"So I understand," Hollinger replied demurely, holding the curtain aside to let the others precede him.

X

THEY found the leading lady waiting for them on the darkened stage. She was dressed quite handsomely in her street costume, with the inevitable fur coat that seems the most characteristic mark of her profession. Without her make-up and stage costume she looked much older than Brainard remembered her to be and also stouter. But her dark face and flashing eyes still preserved an air of confident assurance in her good looks that had characterized Krutzmacht's stenographer.

"Good evening, Mr. Wilkins!" she said promptly as the men approached her. At that unfortunate *nom de guerre* Farson laughed outright. Hollinger came to the rescue.

"Mr. Edgar Brainard, of the new People's Theater; Miss Lorilla Walters of *The Stolen Bonds* company," the fight-trust man said with a little cough.

"We seem both to have changed names," Brainard observed, shaking hands with the leading lady.

"Walters is my stage name," the former stenographer snapped.

"Wilkins was mine — for a few hours !" Brainard laughed.

There followed an awkward pause. In spite of the amiable greeting, Brainard could see fire in the woman's dark eyes and realized that it was not simply for the pleasure of meeting her former antagonist again that she had got Hollinger to bring him behind the scenes. He realized also from the determined bearing and solid form of the woman he had once unceremoniously locked up in Krutzmacht's safe for an hour, that she possessed a kind of vindictive energy which might easily become troublesome to any man she disliked. For a brief moment he wished that a wayward fate had not led his steps on this evening into the Boulevard Theater. But it was so patently absurd that the woman could in any way touch him now after all these years that he easily put aside the thought. He had led his new life so long, tested himself with men and affairs so thoroughly that his early adventures in Krutzmacht's service seemed to him more like a youthful escapade than reality.

During this mute encounter Farson and Hollinger watched the two with interest. Hollinger leaned against one of the properties of the last act in *The Stolen Bonds*, a slightly satirical

smile on his lips as if he found much intellectual amusement in the situation.

"That's a pretty lively show you have made out of our little affair," Brainard remarked at last to the leading lady. "You've touched up the story all along and the *dénouement* isn't according to the facts as I remember them."

Miss Walters gave a little twitch to her short veil as she snapped meaningly:

"Perhaps it isn't finished yet!"

"As our friend Hollinger has been proving to me," Brainard continued in his scoffing tone, "Art and Nature don't always jibe. The artist has always found fault with dull fact, and he gets his revenge upon the real world as you took yours to-night in the play."

"One gets it somehow," Miss Walters replied enigmatically.

"If you are going to discuss Art and Nature," Hollinger put in genially, "let's go to some place where we can have supper."

"A good idea," Brainard agreed. "Come home with me. My man usually has something ready for me at this time."

He felt that something more vital than a discussion of Art and Nature was impending and thought that his own house would be a better place for an animated interview than a public

café. So the four picked their way in the gloom among the bulky properties of *The Stolen Bonds* to the stage exit and there found a cab, which carried them quickly to the little house in Gramercy Park. Miss Walters did not open her mouth during the ride; Hollinger and Farson maintained a factitious conversation on politics, and the contrasts between San Francisco and New York. The fight-trust man ridiculed "progressivism," which was just then coming into vogue, shrewdly pointing out that it merely cloaked the aspirations of "the little fellows" to "get big Capital," and praised California as the only place for an American to live in. From time to time Brainard eyed the actress from his corner of the cab, wondering what her relations with his versatile acquaintance might be. She did not seem interested in the conversation and stared steadily into the street.

There were bottles and cold meats on the table in the dining room as Brainard had promised. Farson discovered in the pantry the ingredients for a hot dish, and Hollinger showed himself to be an expert in this sort of an impromptu feast. The three men were soon busy with chafing dish and corkscrew in a comradely way, but Miss Walters, refusing to lay aside her long fur coat and hat, sauntered about the cheerful room, exam-

ining carefully the pictures and prints upon the walls, the furniture and appointments, which though not especially luxurious were thoroughly comfortable.

"Is this your house?" she asked her host point blank, and when he nodded she remarked:

"A pretty cozy sort of place."

"It is comfortable," Brainard agreed, "and very convenient. I can't stand hotels," he added by way of excuse.

"Some of us have to stand 'em and be mighty thankful when they're fit to live in."

Not having any appropriate reply to this remark, Brainard urged the actress to lay aside her wraps and sit down before the fire, which he had stirred into a blaze. She grudgingly unbuttoned her coat and sat on the edge of the large chair he pushed to the hearth, stretching forth her worn shoes to the warmth, and hitching up her skirt in a slightly vulgar manner.

When Hollinger announced that his dish was ready, the four drew up at the table and had supper, which, thanks to Farson and the fight-trust man, was lively enough. They discussed theatrical matters, especially the Danish play on which the People's had come to grief. Hollinger maintained that the trouble with the play was that it was neither moral nor immoral enough. It was

simply too much like life. "If you are going in for vice, you must paint it red," he pronounced. The leading lady listened and taciturnly ate her supper. Afterwards she accepted a cigarette and turned again to the fire. Brainard searched his brain for a topic that might interest her and finally asked:

"How long have you been on the stage, Miss Walters?"

"It was a good many years ago, the first show I was in," she replied, and added with intention, — "before I met Krutzmacht."

"Where was that?" he asked lightly.

"In Los Angeles in ninety-two."

"You gave up the stage for a time?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "He wanted me to."

"Oh!"

Supper being finished, Brainard led the way to the large living room on the floor above. Here there were books, pictures, and old theatrical bills that seemed to interest Hollinger. He and Farson remained at one end of the room and thus gave Brainard a further opportunity for conversation with Miss Walters. Somewhat softened by the good supper and the friendly reception, she began to talk more freely of herself, her early experiences on the stage in a small stock company that played in the little towns of central and south-

ern California, until she met Herbert Krutzmacht, who happened to be in Los Angeles one night when she was playing. Brainard, who was curious to find out all he could about Krutzmacht, observed carelessly :

“You were working in his office when I — when we last met?”

“Yes — I was working for him,” she said shortly.

“Then why,” he asked suddenly, “did you try to sell him out to his enemies?”

“I had good reasons,” she replied, looking him defiantly in the face, “a woman’s reasons. He hadn’t played fair with me!”

“That is, hadn’t married you as you hoped he would?” Brainard suggested.

“I didn’t say that!” she flashed quickly, realizing that she was in danger of committing herself.

“Well, I hope the railroad people paid you well for your services.”

“They quit paying me, naturally, after you got over to Europe with the stuff they wanted and sold it to the Germans.”

“They dealt with the Germans instead,” Brainard laughed. “It might have paid better to stick by the old man to the end? . . . So, after we parted at Vera Cruz, you went back to the stage — into the legitimate?”

"Mr. Hollinger suggested it when I met him at Jalapa. He got me a place in one of the San Francisco theaters a friend of his was running, and then later on when he went into the show business himself, he took me for one of his companies."

"Do you like the work?"

"It's as good as anything else," the leading lady replied, "so long as you've got to work for your living."

"Most of us have to do that."

"Unless we are clever enough to get somebody else to do the work for us," she sneered.

"Then I think we lose most of the fun."

Miss Walters stared at him skeptically.

"What's the use of your taking that lofty tone with me?"

Brainard laughed good-naturedly. He found in this case, as he had in so many others, that a little personal contact with an enemy modifies and humanizes any antagonism. "Eat with an enemy and lose your hate," is an old proverb, the truth of which he was proving. In spite of the hardness and vulgarity of Miss Lorilla Walters, actress and stenographer, there was something pathetic in her commonplace struggle with life, which he felt through her brief admissions. She had been fighting all her life for herself with some-

what coarse weapons, the only ones she knew how to use, and her appearance, now that she had lost the advantage of youth and was declining towards middle age, her cheap clothes, her defiant manner, — all told of the losing game. He was already beginning to wonder what he could do for Krutzmacht's old stenographer, wondering whether by any chance she could be fitted into the People's company, when his amiable meditations were disagreeably interrupted by the actress.

"It's no use your playing the great philanthropist with *me*," she said truculently. "I know what you are."

"What?"

"A crook."

"You think so?"

"I happen to know it."

"The trouble always has been from the moment I entered Krutzmacht's office that afternoon that you have persisted in this wrong idea. You took me for a common thief then, and you think me a successful swindler now. Well, it happens that I am neither. So you can't understand!"

She looked over the comfortable room, which for the moment they had to themselves, as Farsen had taken Hollinger into the library.

"You seem to have done very well by yourself," she observed.

"I was Krutzmacht's legitimate agent then, when I entered his office, and I have been his executor so to speak every since," — and as she shrugged her shoulders skeptically, he added, "I haven't a cent of my own — really not a cent; I am poorer than you!"

"You want me to believe that song? . . . How about the theater and the mine in Arizona? You see I have been following you up."

"They belong to somebody else."

"Indeed — to whom?"

"I shan't tell you that!"

"Because you can't. . . . They belong to *me*."

"Prove your claim then!"

"And you will hand them over on a platter with a fine bow? . . . You *are* smooth!"

She looked into Brainard's smiling face with an expression of perplexity.

"But until you can prove your claim, beyond doubt, I shall continue in possession both of the mine and of the theater as guardian of the property. And I shall fight you with all the resources I have until I am convinced that your claim is sound."

The actress slowly walked to the fire and threw away the cigarette she had been smoking.

"Well, I guess we understand each other," she said in a less truculent voice.

"I think we do!"

"You are a curious sort of idiot," she remarked musingly. "I don't see why we should fight. There's enough money for two from what the papers say about that mine."

"There's a great deal more than enough for two," Brainard laughed, "in one sense, but only enough for one in another — the right one," he added meaningly.

The actress watched him closely as he crossed the room to straighten a picture that hung awry on the wall. She swayed gently to and fro in the vulgar pose of the heroine of *The Stolen Bonds*, looking into the fire. When she glanced up she saw that Brainard was observing her, a slight smile on his lips. He was thinking that she had the temperament that might have made a good actress, but had been hopelessly spoiled by her bringing up and environment.

"Well?" he said. "Are you ready with the proof?"

"You are a queer sort of Willy," she replied. "I don't believe you and me can ever rightly understand each other."

"I think I understand *you*," Brainard laughed; "you want Krutzmacht's money — that is quite

intelligible! And you may not think so, but I am sorry for you — I would really like to help you out — get a better position for you!”

“But you won’t divide!”

“Never — all or nothing.”

“Do you know where I’m going to-night when I leave your swell little house? Over on Second Avenue into a third-class hotel where my mother and I get along with one bedroom between us. Hollinger don’t pay any big salaries!”

“I am sorry.”

“Krutzmacht treated me like most men treat women they’ve got cheap. I had no reason to be loyal to him, as I told you.”

“Unless,” Brainard suggested lightly, “you happened to be his wife!”

Miss Walters ignored the implication and continued explanatorily:

“When we lost you at Vera Cruz, and the railroad men I was working for had no more use for me, I was down and out. There didn’t seem to be anything for anybody from Krutzmacht’s money except what the Germans got and you! So I went into the show that I told you of. But it seems there was a good deal more property I didn’t know about — he was always close mouthed. You were clever enough to find that mine and keep it for yourself. . . . It wasn’t

until you struck New York that anybody heard about it. Then the papers and the magazines were full of it and of you and of all the money you were throwing away on a theater."

"Publicity is one of the penalties of success," Brainard observed.

"It helped me to find you!"

Brainard bowed in acknowledgment.

"You don't want any more trouble?" she suggested in a gentler tone than she had previously used.

"Don't mind trouble," Brainard retorted quickly.

"If I was content with a half million —"

"Why not make it two?"

XI

At this point Hollinger and Farson returned to the room. Hollinger looked quickly at the position of the two, smiled placidly, and helped himself to another cigar from the box on the table.

"Exchanging confidences?" he inquired.

"Miss Walters persists in acting all the time," Brainard replied. "She thinks this is a sequel to the play and wants me to hand over to her a lot of money."

"Sometimes," Hollinger observed sententiously, "that's the easiest way to square things, isn't it?"

Brainard looked at the fight-trust man in astonishment. Was he an accomplice in a vulgar blackmail game?

"It's not *my* way," he said sharply.

"Half a loaf when no part of the loaf is really yours is always more enjoyable than a legal scrimmage over the whole loaf, it seems to me."

"What do you mean?"

Hollinger threw himself into an easy-chair, lighted his cigar carefully, and beamed at Brainard.

"Did it ever occur to you, my young friend," he began, "that we four are, so to speak, all in the same boat? We are all adventurers — of that noble company of gentlemen and lady adventurers in life — to paraphrase the quaint motto of the Hudson Bay Company. Now in the course of the complicated tissue of adventure that happens to have brought us three together from very unlike walks in life, you" — he thrust the glowing point of his cigar towards Brainard, — "have proved to be the Star. You're It! You hold the bag, so to speak. You seem to have shared some of its golden contents with our young friend here who wants to write plays, as he tells me. I do not happen to want anything for myself. I am perfectly disinterested in this case, — fortunately can afford to be. For I have other and sufficiently fat fish frying in my own little pan. So I can play the gracious rôle of Wisdom. . . . Why not be generous to the lady who lost in this matter of the old Dutchman's millions — you can afford it — and nothing becomes a young unmarried Idealist more than princely generosity with other people's dollars."

"But —" Brainard began.

"Pardon me — one moment — to finish clearing the ground. I don't know the precise manner in which you came into possession of Herbert Krutz-

macht's money any more than I know exactly how he got it away from those who wanted it. I presume the methods were not essentially unlike. It never interests me, these details of acquisition, — to know just how our plutocratic masters have raked together their pelf. But the method of distribution does interest me tremendously. The rich usually show such little capacity for imagination or daring in the disposal of their wealth! However, that is another theme. . . . Now this lady, whose slender talent as an actress I have had the honor of supporting, thinks she has some cogent claim to the unearned increment of the deceased Dutchman. Her idea is probably fantastic — most of our ideas about 'rights' are — but it is a fixed idea with her!" He leaned forward and waved his cigar rhythmically to drive home his words. "Unless her idea is adequately gratified, I am afraid she will be unhappy and make you considerable trouble in the course of her effort to satisfy her quite unreasonable desire. *Voilà tout*, as the French say. Or if you prefer English, Better pay and forget, rather than save a few dollars and regret, my friend."

"You are a good anarchist," Farson observed.

"Thank you for the explanation. I know that I am a practical man. If our rich, our very rich citizens, would only recognize more frankly the

truth I have been stating, they would be happier and so would we others. But they are very timid and conservative; they rarely get beyond libraries, museums, and hospitals. All dull and comparatively useless affairs!"

The fight-trust man sank back into his chair and smoked with half-closed eyes.

"Your talk is interesting, Hollinger, as always," Brainard remarked, "but unfortunately this time I can't follow your advice."

"And why not?"

"Because it happens not to be my own money that Miss Walters desires."

Hollinger waved one hand deprecatingly and murmured:

"A mere matter of words that."

"No, I mean it! As I have been explaining to Miss Walters, I am really a poor man —"

"Poverty is a relative matter — science has demonstrated that."

"Everything of Krutzmacht's I hold as trustee."

"Sounds like Carnegie, or was it the Emperor William? . . . Pardon me, that is another formula. We are all trustees, of course."

Brainard paused and then resumed in a different tone:

"I have been over this matter with Miss Walters and explained my position. I think she under-

stands it quite well. If she can produce proof that she was legally married to the late Herbert Krutzmacht —”

“You would not be as crude as that !” Hollinger exclaimed, opening his eyes. “You know as well as the next man how purely accidental marriage is — the ceremony I mean. The law fastens on that of course — it has to have some nail to cling to —”

“As I told Miss Walters, the trouble with her, and I am afraid with you, too, Hollinger, is that you can’t comprehend an honest man. I happen to be a mere honest man.”

“Pray, don’t believe I doubted it.”

“Just plain, old-fashioned, vulgar honest,” Brainard continued irascibly. “Neither of you seem to understand that simple fact. You proceed on two false assumptions, — first that I am a crook and second that I am a coward — I might add a third, that I am a fool. So long as these false assumptions remain embedded in your mind, we simply can’t do business together.”

He walked suggestively towards the door. Hollinger also rose, a little wearily, a bored look on his face, and chucked his cigar into the fireplace.

“I am sorry,” he said gently, “that we have

succeeded in straining your sense of humor. . . . The trouble with you virtuous people is that you bristle so easily at the least touch. I should think that Virtue would be more self-satisfying to its practitioners. Now I don't bristle because you assume that I am a petty blackmailer and am trying to get money for Miss Walters in order to share with her. That's what you think — confess it !”

“It looks that way,” Brainard said.

“If it does, it doesn't worry me in the least. I don't waste our time trying to prove to you that I am Honest and Disinterested, that I came here to-night really out of friendly interest in you — to try with the aid of my equable temperament and clear intelligence to avoid the mistakes that are likely to occur when excessive desire meets excessive virtue. But I have failed. You two will have to make up your accounts alone — or with the vulgar assistance of the courts. Good luck to you. And good night !”

He extended one hand to Brainard and the other to Farson.

“I will give myself the pleasure of setting you down at your hotel,” he said to the actress, who was slowly and somewhat regretfully buttoning her fur coat.

... When Farson and the actress had left the room,

Brainard detained Hollinger and said contritely :

"I'm afraid I did suspect you of collusion with Miss Walters — I'm sorry, for I have always liked you."

"It's very natural. You yourself must know how hard it is in this world to be really disinterested without incurring unjust suspicions. However, that's nothing !"

"The trouble is I can't understand you — never did !"

"I'm afraid I can't return the compliment. I flatter myself that I understand you thoroughly."

"Do you remember that first time I met you — on the train, the Overland Limited, going to California? You were in your compartment reading *Paradise Lost* with the help of a dictionary."

The fight-trust man blushed slightly, probably at the mention of the dictionary.

"You mean the occasion when that active young seeker for notoriety, the special district attorney of San Francisco, was trying to put me in state's prison ?"

"You were under bonds then, seventy-five thousand dollars of bonds. I remember how awed I was at the size of your bonds !"

"Yes, I recall the occasion now," the prize ring magnate said with a pleasant smile. "I

didn't remember that was our first meeting — I meet so many people everywhere — nor that I happened to be making the acquaintance also of the famous puritan poet. . . . The trouble with you, my friend, if you will permit me to indulge in a last bit of advice, is that you are so terribly conventional in your judgments of character, in your expectations of what people are to be. That is a very common limitation. You expected to find in me a bloody and brutal bounder, smelling of whisky and dazzling with diamonds. Instead you found an intelligent gentleman, interested in literature and life. The prize ring, Mr. Brainard, is as much an arena of Art in its way as the popular theater to which you are devoting so much effort and such large sums of money. And I was engaged in it as a business, as I am now engaged in the theatrical business. A financier, even of the prize ring, is not obliged to dirty himself with vulgar contacts. That explains the lofty idealism of some of our most prominent citizens. You plan and dream from above — the degrading associations are left to others, as doubtless you have already learned in the management of your own properties. . . . Well, I must not keep Miss Walters waiting below. Good night, my foolish Idealist! Good luck and more wisdom to you before our next meeting.”

They descended to the hall which they found empty. Farson was getting the actress a last cigarette. As they waited, Hollinger observed musingly :

“You doubtless know about the marriage laws in California?”

“No, I don’t.”

“They are extremely, — what shall I say? Lax — liberal. You see our people out there are so unconventional and accidental in their habit of life, that the courts are forced to take the most liberal view of these personal matters. And we are as a people chivalrous towards women — much more so than you are here. So the courts are inclined to decide the question of marriage largely on whether the woman ought to have been married, rather than on the mere fact of the ceremony. That accounts for the large number of posthumous wives and their claims that turn up after the death of a rich man on the Coast.”

“Am I to regard this as a threat?” Brainard inquired.

“Bless you, my dear boy, don’t be so sensitive ! Advice, just impertinent, uncalled-for advice, which I am so fond of giving. I should have left all that to Miss Lorilla’s lawyers — they are the proper persons to expound the California statutes.”

"You don't believe for one instant that Miss Walters was really married to old Krutzmacht?"

Hollinger shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* as the Mexicans say. I have no doubt she ought to have been."

"That is a very different matter."

Hollinger again shrugged his shoulders. In the pause that followed, Hollinger began to muse aloud softly, as if he were presenting a case to himself:

"Her life has been typical. Born on a dreary little ranch, educated for a few years in one of our national institutions for the stultifying of youth, then deserted by her worthless father and forced to do something for herself and her useless mother, — what is the answer to that? Chorus girl. Twelve dollars a week and mother to support as well as herself and no special talent or exceptional looks, — what is the answer to that? Man."

"Whom the girl in her gratitude tried to sell out when he was in a tight place. No, I am afraid you can't make out a very good case for charity!"

"Just what had Krutzmacht done for her? . . . Changed her job from a dubiously respectable one to an undoubtedly disreputable one — and made her work in his office besides. No, the balance is on her side of the ledger. . . . Now

she has matured, — oh, very much matured; has no protector, and mother still to support as well as herself, — what is the answer to that?"

"If you put your claim on the ground of social service, pure and simple," Brainard replied, "it might be considered, I suppose. But I don't think Miss Walters would accept charity."

"Charity — justice — prudence? What's the use of finding the right name? In the last analysis they are all meaningless."

"You forget they mean something to me."

"She hungers for some of life's goodies." Hollinger resumed his musing, ignoring Brainard's reply. "But comparatively little would satisfy her — a secure home somewhere in southern California for herself and that tough relic of a parent, a little income, enough to assure permanent idleness. Consider what a boon that would be to the stage in itself! Possibly matrimony later on, why not? . . . As Krutzmacht's residuary — er, trustee, — that's what you called it, I believe, you ought to provide decently for his emotional lapses. . . . I put it to you now as a Sentimentalist, Idealist, Lover of Great Ideas."

"You would talk me into giving her everything I have," Brainard laughed, "if I could only once bring myself to accept your point of view."

"And that is?"

"That life is merely a juggle of words."

"Ah, you are too young. One cannot fight successfully against youth, even with ideas!"

Miss Walters appeared, followed by Farson, and the conversation was at an end. The actress looked at Brainard from beneath her flaring hat, and her eyes had an unpleasant luster in them. No, mere charity would not satisfy that "thirst for vengeance upon life!"

"Well, Mr. Wilkins," she began with a heavy effort at irony, "it is always sad for old friends to part. But in this case we may hope to meet again before long."

"I hope so!" Brainard replied politely. "Let me put you into the cab."

Hollinger followed them slowly down the steps. At the very door of the cab he lingered.

"In that brief visit which you made to the Coast did you ever come across a rattler in operation? No! It makes a slight, but perfectly clear noise first by way of warning — and then it strikes! Some women resemble the rattler. Look out for the sting!"

"Thanks! I shall."

"Oh!" the prize ring magnate sighed in farewell, "my poor Idealist, what a lot of useless trouble you make for yourself and others!"

XII

BRAINARD carefully put out all the lights on the lower floor and then mounted the stairs to the room above. There he found Farson smoking a cigarette before the open fire and staring straight before him, as if his mind was occupied with a novel set of ideas. At sight of Brainard a curious smile crossed his face, and he looked interrogatively at his employer.

"Well?" he murmured.

"They are a pretty pair of — I was going to say crooks. But I don't think my friend Hollinger is exactly that — I hope not."

"He used to have the reputation of being the squarest man in his profession — the very soul of honor in the fight business. That was what gave him his prestige with the politicians, until the district attorney got after him."

"I can't make him out!"

"It's not hard to make *her* out," Farson commented.

"Her methods are only too obvious!"

"Did I ever tell you just what happened that

evening in San Francisco after I saw you off on the ferry with your bag?"

"The last I saw of you," Brainard replied, "you were on the run to the telephone booth to get your beat about me and Krutzmacht to your paper!"

"Well, after I 'phoned the story I streaked it back to Krutzmacht's office. I fancied there might be something doing there after the woman got loose from the safe. There was! She had the marshal's office and the police department — I don't know but the fire brigade too — all up there buzzing, and she was trying to raise Crane, — you know the big railroad gun on the other side? She'd kept that telephone working ever since Peters threw the combination. If you had seen the temper she was in, you might have left her in that safe somewhat longer to cool off. . . . She seems to have quieted down a good deal. But I could see signs of her old temper this evening. I don't believe adversity has improved it materially."

"Probably not!" Brainard remarked, yawning and looking at his watch. "Three o'clock! Our friends made the time pass quickly."

Farson did not move from his position before the dying fire. The late hour made no impression upon him, and Brainard did not seem anxious to get to bed.

"What are you going to do?" the young man asked.

"Nothing."

"Nothing!" Farson exclaimed in surprise. "You don't mean to say —"

"I will let Lorilla make the next move — it's up to her."

"You won't take Hollinger's hint?"

"Buy her off? It would take too much, if we began that game. Besides, why should I?"

The young man was evidently puzzled.

"The only thing she can do," Brainard explained, "is to produce a wife or heirs to Krutzmacht. I don't believe she can do that successfully. If she does, I am quite ready to resign without a fight. But," he repeated musingly, "I don't believe she can prove that she was his wife."

"There would be harder things to prove," the secretary ventured, "especially in a California court!"

Brainard smiled. He knew that Farson thought him a fool to run the risk of a law suit and possibly failure in exposing fraudulent claims to the property that he held on such slight legal authority.

"I believe I never told you the whole story," he said. "You probably think, if you think about it at all — just as Hollinger thinks — that I am a lucky and none-too-scrupulous adventurer,

who had a fortune dropped into his hands by a peculiar accident and have enjoyed its possession undisturbed by any claimants up to this moment. But it isn't quite like that. And there's rather more drama in the true story of Krutzmacht's fortune than anything we have yet offered at the People's Theater !”

He took another cigar, remade the fire, and told Farson all the details of his hunt for the vague Melody ever since he had first found positive indications of her existence in the deserted house above Monument.

“Latterly,” he concluded, “Melody has grown somewhat dim in my mind. Perhaps the theater has taken her place as reality and as mistress; for I have always thought of myself as doing it with her money ! But to-night when that woman turned up here with her vulgar, brazen air and tried to hold me up in a blackmailing way, something made me feel that Melody is still alive, in spite of all the chances that she isn't, and that she will turn up in time to get her own.”

“She will have to appear soon !” Farson exclaimed.

“I felt in talking to Lorilla that she was perfectly conscious she has no legal right to the money — knew all along that Krutzmacht was married and had an heir or had made a will —”

"Did you ever get hold of that trunk, the one I checked for you to Chicago when you were telephoning Krutzmacht's office to inquire about Lorilla's health?"

"It had disappeared before I was able to claim it. I suppose it went in the unclaimed baggage sale."

"Never — it was too soon. She's got it!"

"I don't believe there was anything in it except some ledgers and letter files that might interest the railroad people."

"A will?"

"Perhaps. But I doubt it. She would have used it before this!"

The secretary seemed more concerned over the situation than did Brainard. The latter said musingly as he dropped his cigar into the ashes:

"Of course, if there is no Melody, or if I can't find her, which amounts to the same thing, that woman might as well have the money as anybody else. At least, a reasonable amount. Krutzmacht probably owed her liberal compensation. . . . But I shan't give up my belief in Melody until the courts compel me to!"

"You don't mean that you would let that Walters woman have the money?" the younger man demanded in astonishment.

"Farson, you don't understand. I suppose it seems absurd to you — it does to me at times. But I have never for one moment considered myself the owner of Krutzmacht's millions — never! I suppose that has given me my freedom of action, my feeling that I could do things like this theater, — not for myself. In my own mind I was always acting for some one else. It may be all imagination, but if it is, Melody just as an idea has helped me tremendously, — to keep my hands clear, not to be corrupted by the large sums of money at my disposal, — to make a man of me! It's a mighty helpful thing to be in the position of trustee to some unknown person. It might solve some of our hardest economic problems if more of our wealth was held on the same terms. I can't explain it all, but it makes you free really not to have a cent of your own!"

Farson murmured something that sounded like the term which Hollinger had twice used, by way of contempt, in describing Brainard.

"No, I can't understand!" he sighed.

"Well, you'd better get to bed," Brainard laughed. "There's nothing to worry about. That's one happy result of my attitude. If it will make you feel any more sure of my sanity, I will see my lawyers in the morning. They are not

likely to take sentimental views, I can tell you. I have been too profitable a client !”

After Farson had taken the hint and removed his bewildered person from the room, Brainard sat for another hour before the dead fire, in a sleepless revery. The unexpected visit of the stenographer and the fight-trust man had brought back vividly a long train of memories of what had constituted his active life for the last four years. The situation that had developed had again emphasized the dream quality of all living. It is the conventionally expected in life that makes what men ordinarily term reality. A slight turn from the ordinary course of events produces a sense of unreality. For four years there had come to Brainard, turn after turn, utterly unexpected and unforeseen, each one producing this sense of the essential unreality of life. But behind it all had grown the living reality of his own will and character that had been formed by meeting and dealing with the exigencies of each situation fairly according to the laws of his nature.

As he had said to his secretary, the result was that he found himself now ready to abandon his adventurous position upon demand without a sense of overwhelming loss and disaster. He had no more feeling of enmity or of contempt for

Lorilla Walters than Hollinger evinced. She was playing her little part in the complex scheme of destiny, playing it vulgarly and crudely, and he suspected improperly. But what occupied his thoughts at this crisis, much more than the possible machinations the actress might be able to set on foot against him or the instability of his own fortunes, was the woman's situation. What Hollinger had said for her in plea of extenuation had touched him more deeply than he had let the fight-trust man see. It was perfectly true that she should be provided for out of Krutzmacht's loot in life. He tried to think how this could be brought about without compromising himself or his elusive mistress's rights. He resolved on the morrow to see not only his lawyers but Hollinger also, and contrive some plan by which the ex-stenographer could obtain justice without gratifying her spite.

"But she is not the old man's heir — of that I am sure!" he said to himself as at last he sought his bed. "And Melody lives — I stick to that! The dream will hold to the end, not go to pieces in any vulgar fashion like this!"

XIII

THE perfectly correct New York lawyers to whom Brainard told his tale later that morning evinced no surprise. There was nothing in the heart or brain of man, they seemed to say, that could flutter a New York lawyer. "It would be advisable to find Miss Melody straightway," they felt, and inquired what sort of title Brainard held to the Arizona mine. When he confessed that it was only a tax title, they remarked that under the Arizona laws any heirs of the dead German had a year more in which to redeem the property. That did not trouble Brainard. The lawyers very strongly urged their client not to make advances to Miss Walters or to her friend and manager on her behalf. That would be suicidal, they averred, opening the way at once to endless blackmail and even criminal prosecution. "Let the matter rest until the interested parties make some move," they advised, in a perfectly cautious and obvious way.

"I've done my best to find the heirs, as you people very well know. I'm convinced there's only one, and I'm not sure that she has any legal

claim. But hers was the only name the old man mentioned the one time I saw him."

"You certainly made a mistake in not getting hold of that trunk!"

"After my settlement in Paris with the bankers," Brainard explained, "I felt that it was of the first importance to go to Monument as soon as possible; and by the time I turned up at the Chicago railroad station, the trunk had disappeared."

"If no heir can be found, there is not much danger of trouble; but if they should happen to get hold of this girl you call Melody, it might be awkward."

"I should be only too glad if She could be found, by them or any one else!" Brainard exclaimed with sincerity. "I could then wash my hands of the whole matter."

The lawyer looked at him uncomprehendingly, then resumed:

"Assuming that no heir of the old man is forthcoming, the only harm that these persons could do you would be to stir up the attorney-general to take action to recover the lands for the Territory. They would have to move quickly to get their action before the courts, and the proper representations at Washington would discourage any such litigation."

"That doesn't worry me. But that woman! She's perfectly capable of becoming Krutzmacht's widow and providing a whole brood of children."

"You mean fraudulent?"

"Or left-handed," Brainard suggested. "I believe she's training them now!"

"We shall have to wait until she produces them in court, then," his counsel remarked with a grin.

As the weeks and then the months slipped by without any sign from Krutzmacht's former stenographer Brainard almost forgot the midnight visit that she and the fight-trust magnate had made and the disturbing conversation which had taken place. During this summer the People's Company played a short season in Chicago, and were so cordially received in that city, which seemed to be more open-minded in theatrical matters than New York, that Brainard felt he had made a mistake in not starting his dramatic enterprise in this thoroughly American community. An opportunity offering of securing the lease of a new theater in Chicago, Brainard decided to take it and support a second company in the West to interchange with the parent company. He placed MacNaughton in charge of the new company, having found a younger and more adaptable

man to work with him in New York. All these arrangements took much time and thought and involved many trips between the two cities to complete the negotiations. Brainard had the satisfaction of knowing that if they had failed in their first season to make the impression he had hoped, at least they had shown courage and determination. The Idea was far from dead, — was growing slowly and adapting itself, as all large Ideas must, to the environment and the conditions. . . .

One morning, the day after his return from one of these hurried journeys to Chicago, Brainard found Farson immersed as usual in the folds of a newspaper over his coffee. Instead of the customary greeting, the secretary handed over the paper with the simple remark :

“She’s struck !”

A front page story of the usual type, emanating from the Pacific Coast, related that a woman claiming to be Krutzmacht’s lawful widow, married to him several years before in a small southern California town, was about to institute legal proceedings to recover the remnants of the dead promoter’s scattered fortune. At the time of Krutzmacht’s death, so the story ran, it was supposed that his large fortune had been completely swallowed up in his unsuccessful enter-

prises, but recently through a series of extraordinary events a very considerable amount of unsuspected assets had been discovered, to which the widow now laid claim. Eminent counsel had been retained in the case, and sensational developments were promised, involving a capitalist well known in New York and Arizona.

As Brainard having finished the story laid the newspaper down with a slight smile, Farson observed :

“So it’s on !”

“Apparently. . . . It took her some time to get into action. I suppose she was collecting her properties.”

“She’ll produce a son in court lispng ‘Pap Krutz,’” the secretary growled. He could not forgive Brainard for what he called his “weak” manner of handling the affair.

“Now we shall have an opportunity of seeing what sort of story she can put up,” Brainard remarked, proceeding unconcernedly with his breakfast. “Perhaps this action, through the notoriety it will give to Krutzmacht’s affairs, will serve to produce the real heir,” he added hopefully.

But after a visit to his lawyers Brainard was less optimistic. They pointed out to him that undoubtedly the first legal move would be to tie up the great Melody mine by an injunction.

Whether the so-called widow could prove her marriage to the satisfaction of the court or not, the mine must remain idle. And the case might drag on for a couple of years or more, depending upon the resources the widow could command. During all this time there would be no income from the property; instead it would greatly deteriorate. The lawyers' prediction was quickly fulfilled. Brainard found himself without the large monthly income from the flow of the sulfur wells, with an expensive law suit on his hands, and two greedy theatrical companies to be provided for.

"As Hollinger warned me, *Lorilla is a Rattler*," Brainard said to the secretary when the two went over the situation. "It looks very much, my boy, as if this law suit would be the final curtain for the great Idea. I'm tied up short. The Chicago theater has taken a lump of money. I don't believe I could lay my hands on fifty thousand dollars cash, all told."

"I wonder where she is getting her money to fight the case," Farson said.

"Perhaps Hollinger is putting it up — as a promising speculation!"

"You don't think he would do that?"

"Why not? It goes with his philosophy. He gave me my chance to compromise —"

"If you'd only taken it!"

"And when he saw that I wouldn't compromise, he might decide to play on the other side. It makes little difference, anyway. If Miss Walters has any sort of claim, she can easily get all the money she needs. There are always 'eminent counsel' ready to take that kind of case on a good contingent fee."

"Well, what will you do now?" Farson asked in a depressed tone.

"First I must get rid of the lease of the Chicago theater."

"It's too bad — the Chicago theater opened well. Mac thinks it will almost make expenses."

"What Mac thinks and what the public thinks we have found to be two different propositions," Brainard replied. "I don't believe Chicago will miss us much. But I hate to close the New York theater."

"Will you have to do that?"

"You know the figures — they don't improve!"

"I suppose that dishes my play."

Farson had been hard at work during the summer on a play of American life, based largely on material that Louisiana Delacourt had contributed in a series of amusing confidences about her own experiences, before her departure to com-

plete her education in Europe. It was to be called *Her Great Adventure*, and had been coming on very fast latterly. The plan between the two friends had been to try it out toward the close of the present season, and, if the play proved successful, to open with it in the fall.

"I hadn't thought about your play," Brainard exclaimed sympathetically. "We must keep the house open until we can produce *Her Great Adventure*. There's money enough in the bank for that." He patted his secretary affectionately on the back. "But finish it, my boy, as soon as you can. That place eats money, and when the news leaks we shan't be able to keep our company together long. Can you be ready by the first of March?"

"It will have to be ready! It's awfully good of you, Brainard; and the play might possibly make money, you know."

"If that happens, it will break all records for the People's. We will give it every chance, anyway. How shall we cast it? Will Clara Dudley do for the girl?"

Forgetting all about Krutzmacht's new widow and their financial predicament they began to discuss the cast for *Her Great Adventure*. The leading character was a young woman who had come fearlessly and pennilessly out of the great

West, to find a career in New York. Brainard remarked suddenly :

"The woman to play that part is Louisiana herself." Farson, for some reason, did not welcome the suggestion strongly. He preferred to take his chances with a more experienced actress. "Where is Louisiana, by the way? You haven't given me any news of her for some time," Brainard asked.

Farson blushed slightly as he replied :

"She's in London just now — having a great time, I judge from the number of dashes and exclamations scattered over her letters. Characteristic style, you know. She hasn't taken down much of the original bunting she carried."

"She wouldn't!" Brainard exclaimed with a laugh. "Louisiana is a genius. Don't tell her what's going to happen over here. Let her have her little dance out as long as it is possible. Her hard times, poor child, will begin soon enough!"

"She writes that Cissie Pyce is over there. Remember Cissie — our first experiment as emotional lady?"

"She wept all over this carpet when I fired her — do I remember?"

"Louisiana says that Cissie has been taken up by Bantam, and is coming back to the States to play in *The Star of the Seven Seas*."

"We'll make somebody's fortune yet," Brainard

commented, "by discharging 'em, if in no other way. But Louisiana was really our first and only find — the one personality that we might have developed and produced."

"And she found us!" the secretary corrected.

"Let's see what it has cost all told." He ran over on his fingers the different large items of expense that the great Idea had involved: "The theater building eight hundred, the first year in New York two hundred, Chicago . . . one million six hundred thousand odd for Louisiana!" Brainard concluded whimsically. "And she's not yet launched. Our kind of art comes high, Ned!"

"You're a tip-top loser," the young man said admiringly. "Don't you ever think what it will mean to you, if Lorilla should win her suit?"

Brainard stretched himself leisurely.

"Except for being licked in this theater business — and I don't like being beaten any better than the next man — I should howl for joy when they produce the fictitious widow and the orphan son in court. It would set me free for another great adventure. That's what Herbert Krutzmacht and Melody have done for one Edgar Brainard!"

In his eyes was the azure glitter of the sky above the stern Arizona mountains. For it was, indeed, a glorious world of venture for him whose soul was keyed to the right pitch.

XIV

NEVERTHELESS, Brainard felt depressed as the time drew near when the doors of his theater would have to close, the windows be boarded up. Even should he win the case against the fraudulent claimants of the Melody, the great Idea could never be wholly perfected in all the splendid details that he had dreamed. No one man, were he Croesus incarnate, could create a national art. He had learned that. . . .

On the afternoon of the first rehearsal of *Her Great Adventure*, Brainard came early to the theater and waited in the library. It was a pleasant place, he reflected, as his eyes wandered over the empty room, with its polished marquetry floor richly covered with rugs, and the charming empire furniture, clocks, and ornaments that he had taken the pains to place there. He had tried to make these public rooms as clublike as possible, with ample lounging places, so that the theater might be something of a home for the players, as well as a workshop. Above the library was a glorified green room, where simple meals were to

be had for a moderate price. All these details were part of the Idea, as he had seen it.

The People's had a much better company this year, he reflected, — no great talent, but all fairly competent, and they worked together well. His enthusiasm and Farson's had finally penetrated the ignorant and selfish surface of theatrical nature. Mac had been tactfully relegated to Chicago, and the promising young actor Leaven-tritt was fast making a place for himself as manager.

The company was really getting into shape. Ignored as they were by the critics and the "intelligent" public, or ridiculed for their efforts, the People's Theater had won the allegiance of its players. They were developing a fine loyalty to the Idea, and a respect for themselves as members of an institution that had not been founded for profit. The week before, when Brainard had felt obliged to tell the company of his financial difficulties, and of the fate probably in store for the theater, there had been genuine, unselfish concern.

"Your salaries will be paid until the close of the season," he told them; "and, in addition, each one will receive the percentage of his pension earned by his length of service. Unfortunately, there are no profits to share; but of course I have assumed all losses. And now I want you to do

your utmost for our last play — this piece by Mr. Farson. Give it the very best you have in you. It is a strong play, an American play, the sort of play for us to produce. Let us end well !”

Then they had proceeded to the reading of the piece. Afterward, many of the company had come to him to express personally their honest disappointment at the enforced closing of the People's Theater. They seemed to realize that their loss was more than that of salary.

“And we'll make *Her Great Adventure* go !” they all said.

The spirit of the players had been comforting to the embarrassed patron.

“The People's might have won out in time, with such a company — who knows ?” he mused to the secretary.

“We may win out yet !” the young playwright answered, with a certain touch of vanity.

“I hope so, for your sake, I'm sure ; but one play, no matter how successful, could not keep the Idea afloat.”

On the eve of failure, a new light had dawned in the enthusiastic mind of the founder. He realized that whatever one man tries to carry through alone, by brute force of will, without regard for the sympathy and the help of others, is destined to fail, especially where it is a matter of art that

should appeal to the many. Not Mrs. Donnie Pearmain and her "upper classes" were needed, to be sure, but the People; and the People's Theater had failed to touch the People. Very likely, Brainard mused, Lorilla was the hand of fate needed to prove this deeper truth to him. He had failed to find his vanished mistress, Melody, and with her inheritance he had tried to achieve the impossible. Now that inheritance might be taken altogether out of his control, and the great Idea vanish into the air from which his will had conjured it. . . .

A page brought Brainard a letter with a foreign postmark just as he was leaving the library for the theater. It was a hasty little scribble from Miss Delacourt — one of the few with which the young lady had favored him. In a hand that galloped unevenly over the paper, she informed him :

"I'm coming home — sail Saturday, on the *Amerika*, with Cissie Pyce. Best wishes !

"L. D."

Brainard wondered what freak had possessed the youngster thus to cut short her lark, as he went to the telephone to inquire when the *Amerika* was due in New York. He determined to say nothing to Farson of the girl's homecoming and to meet the young woman at the dock himself.

There might, after all, be some method in her insanity — and there might be some good fortune in it for Farson and his play. For the little neurasthenic Miss Dudley, who, to the most casual eye, had evidently never been farther West than Hoboken, was hardly the ideal of adventurous American womanhood that the dramatist had drawn in his Gertrude. He would see Louisiana first, and make up his mind whether she was safe to try before speaking to Farson, whom he suspected of a more than friendly liking for the young woman.

When Brainard returned to the auditorium he found a stranger leaning over a rear seat, an unlighted cigar between his teeth, apparently interested in the lines of the new play that Leaven-tritt was going over with the company. As Brainard approached, the man turned his head; it was Hollinger.

"Hello!" he said, and nodding his head toward the stage asked, "New piece?"

For a few moments the two men listened to the halting lines from the stage, then Brainard asked coldly:

"Did you want to see me?"

Hollinger looked at him coolly, the merest smile on his curving lips.

"Yes," he replied, "that is if you aren't busy?"

I was in New York and thought I'd look you up."

Brainard led the way to his private office, which was in the front of the theater behind the library.

"What is it?" he asked shortly, closing the door and standing above his visitor, who had seated himself and crossed his knees comfortably. Hollinger's smile deepened to a grin.

"I suppose you have something to say to me," Brainard added impatiently.

"Nothing in particular," Hollinger replied. "I wanted to *see* you!"

"What for?"

"Well, to see how you take it for one thing."

Brainard sat down in his chair more calmly and waited.

"Don't you think you made a mistake?" Hollinger inquired.

"No!"

"You don't mind the — er — row?"

"Not in the least."

"You don't want to stop it all before it's too late?"

Brainard shook his head slowly.

"Not *your* way," he said emphatically.

"I didn't suppose you would," the old fight-trust magnate sighed.

"You knew I wouldn't!"

"Sometimes your kind come to their senses — too late. I just thought I would sound you again before the case came to trial."

"And save your money for counsel fees?" Brainard inquired suavely.

"Oh, that doesn't trouble me," Hollinger replied lightly. "You guessed that I was putting up the money? How clever of you!"

"But I can't yet bring myself to believe that you mean to share with that woman in the profits of her perjury, if she succeeds."

Hollinger smoked a few moments before replying.

"I don't mind telling you that I have no intention of taking a cent from Miss Walters, or Mrs. Krutzmacht, as I suppose we ought to call the lady."

"Then why do you go to all this trouble?"

"For various reasons, my dear young man. For the amusement I find in it for one thing. Can you understand that?"

"With some difficulty."

"A sort of sporting interest in seeing whether she can win and carry off the bag, with the mine, from your hands, just as the other time I was immensely interested in seeing you escape from her hands at Jalapa. . . . She has a very pretty case, a very pretty case," he mused. "The best

legal talent have passed on it and found it quite flawless. It ought to go through without a hitch."

"Unless the real heir should turn up meanwhile."

"You still stick to that romantic fiction — that young man's fancy?"

"You said that you had other reasons for helping Miss Walters?"

"One other reason: I felt that you had treated her — unsympathetically — oh, quite correctly from your puritan point of view; morally you are always above reproach, my young friend. But you are slightly inhuman. Your attitude that night when we discussed this matter at your house was both narrow and inhuman. It disgusted me, if you care to know frankly what I thought."

"And in order to punish me for not following your advice you are conniving with this woman in the perpetration of fraud," Brainard sneered.

"You use words rather crudely," Hollinger replied in a mild tone. "I don't understand 'punish' and 'fraud' in the way you do. You are determined to complicate a simple enough situation, and I am determined to give your virtue an all-round test. . . . Well, your mind is made up?"

"Absolutely!" Brainard exclaimed, rising to terminate the interview.

"Perhaps you have your own widow and child?" Hollinger suggested with a laugh.

"Possibly!"

Then they went into the library, which the fight-trust man looked at with much interest.

"Would you like to see the house?" Brainard asked good-naturedly, always proud to show off his beloved theater.

"Above everything! I've read so much about it."

Brainard conducted Hollinger over the building, explaining to him his purposes in making it more than a mere auditorium with a stage. Hollinger admired generously and intelligently all that he saw. As they came out at last in the darkened auditorium where the new play was still being read, he remarked to his host:

"I am very much obliged. It is all extremely interesting, a kind of kindergarten for the drama. Is this one of your products?" he nodded towards the stage.

"It's Farson's new play. We have high hopes for it!" Brainard said.

"Well, hurry up with it. I suppose you won't be running theaters for amusement after — er — the event?"

"That remains to be seen!"

"If you find that you want to get rid of this place, let me know, will you?"

"Thanks!"

"I might find a use for it. . . . I believe Miss Walters has ambitions to be a real star with her own theater. That is more *chic* these days than owning a copper mine, and she will need occupation."

"So that was another of your reasons for this call?" Brainard suggested with a laugh.

Hollinger smiled.

"She might take you on as manager — how would that do?"

"I'll discuss it with her personally, when the time comes!"

"I shall advise her to let you manage the mine instead!" Hollinger retorted, after listening to another of Farson's rather flamboyant periods. "I think she and I have better notions of what the 'People' like."

With a last smile he slowly sauntered towards the exit, where he paused long enough to catch a few more of the speeches in *Her Great Adventure*, which seemed to cause him unhappiness.

"Oh, Lord!" he murmured, and rushed for the door.

XV

As the big, pot-bellied steamship was being slowly pushed into her berth, Brainard, standing at the end of the pier, fancied that he could recognize two little figures on the upper deck. These feminine figures, rather eccentrically dressed, were evidently the knot of a laughing, joking circle of American men, all exhilarated by their approaching return to their beloved city. When the great black hull threw its shadow over the dock, one of the little figures waved both arms.

"That's Louisiana, sure enough!" Brainard exclaimed, much relieved to know that the impulsive young woman had not abandoned her home-coming at the last moment from some fresh whim.

Ever since he had received her little note on the previous Monday, he had been astonished at himself. The prospect of seeing Louisiana again had often come into his mind with an agreeable sensation, hopping in without reason, as if sure of a welcome. This morning he had displayed a greater nervousness at breakfast than he had

shown over the possible loss of the Melody mine, and had reached the dock an hour too early.

All this anxiety he explained to himself on the score of his desire to help on his secretary's play. From the beginning Miss Dudley had shown such an inability to understand her part, and to cope with the character of Gertrude, that the young playwright was in despair. And yet Brainard's interest in the maiden effort of his young secretary had not led him to confide the news of Louisiana's unexpected return. He had been gratified indeed to learn that the young man did not suspect it.

Brainard wormed his way into the crowd at the foot of the gangway and waited impatiently while the thin stream of passengers filed down to the dock. The two actresses came together. Louisiana reached out a thin little arm to grasp Brainard's hand with a ringing "Howdy!" before she gained the dock.

The European trip had made little surface change in the young woman. She was hugging to her a variety of flowers, several parcels, and a toy dog — a substitute for that shambling pup with which she used to appear at the People's Theater.

"Thanks!" she bubbled, as Brainard relieved her of these impedimenta. "A lot of trucky rubbish I couldn't jam into my trunk nohow,

though I got a tub of a German steward to do the dead-weight act on the lid. You see, I started from London on the run for the steamer — didn't have time to pack."

She glanced furtively at Brainard, then down the long pier.

"This town looks good to me, even after Vienna and Paris. Yes, I'd like some real breakfast, thank you! You must have camped out here all night to turn up at such an hour. And how's everything? How's the —"

Her voluble stream suddenly ceased, and her gray eyes rested full on Brainard's face, as if even in her heedless mood she hesitated to ask certain painful questions. Louisiana was very pretty and quite smartly dressed, as Brainard noticed, with a sense of satisfaction in the size of the letter of credit that he had replenished generously from time to time during the last year. Yes, in spite of her careless chatter, any one could see that Miss Delacourt was something of a person now.

Her companion joined them.

"You know Miss Pyce, of course," Louisiana said. "Spell it with a *y*, please! We ran bump into each other in Piccadill last week. Cissie had engaged a deck stateroom all to herself, little swell, and that's how I could get back on this boat."

"But why did you come in such a hurry?"

Brainard asked, when Miss Pyce was diverted to the inspection of her trunks. "I thought you were to stay over until the fall."

Louisiana looked softly up out of her gray eyes.

"But you see Cissie told me all about it!"

"Told you what?"

"That your mine had gone dry, or something, and the theater had to close, and you were in a hole generally."

"But that wouldn't have made any difference about you — at least at present. I told Farson not to write you of our troubles."

"He didn't. If it hadn't been for Cissie, I shouldn't have known a thing, though she said it was all in the papers. But I never read the papers over there."

"I wish Cissie had kept her mouth shut!"

"She couldn't, you know, if she had something nasty about the People's to tell. But ain't you the least bit glad to see me, after all my hustle to get here as quick as I could?"

"You know I am awfully glad!"

"Naturally I couldn't stay over there, batting around, and you folks in trouble — just couldn't have swallowed a mouthful of food!"

Brainard held out his hand.

"Thank you! That's the nicest thing I have heard for many a day."

"Perhaps I could do something to help?"

"What?" Brainard asked jokingly. "Discover the real heir to the property?"

Miss Delacourt looked puzzled by this reference to his predicament. Evidently Miss Pyce's information had been only of the most general character. The details of the threatened suit had not been considered of sufficient importance by the news agencies to cable to Europe.

"I can do something," the girl said, drawing herself up haughtily. "I'm no stage-struck kid now. I'm going to act."

"There is something you can do for me — for us," Brainard hastened to say, remembering his chief excuse for meeting her at the dock. "I want you to come up to my house for breakfast right away, and hear what it is. Bring Miss Pyce, too, if she will come."

"Oh, she'll come! Cissie carries around a trunkful of floppy airs, but she's a right good sort. I'm going to stay with her until I strike a job. She's half promised to get me something in *The Star of the Seven Seas* — kitchen wench, I fancy. Cissie isn't giving much away."

"There's something better than that ready for you. We want you to do the Gertrude in Ned's play."

"Is the People's still open?" she cried in as-

tonishment. "Cissie said it had gone dead broke, and was shut for good."

"This is our last effort; and we want to go down waving the flag. It's Farson's play —"

"Yes, I know — he tried to put me in, but I bet he didn't succeed."

"It's a good play, though! And Ned has slaved for the theater these last two years. We must do our best for him. Has he written you about the play?"

"Oh, yes; I should say he had — lots."

The calm, impersonal way in which she admitted her correspondence with the young secretary pleased Brainard unreasonably.

"He'll be there for luncheon; so speak to your friend, and let's be off."

Miss Pyce condescended to accept the invitation to breakfast from the proprietor of the People's Theater, as she had nothing better to do with her time. Her own manager had wounded her vanity by not appearing at the dock with an automobile. So the three were soon tucked into Brainard's motor and crossing the ferry. Miss Pyce inquired after the fate of the People's company in a tone of lofty kindness, until Louisiana kicked her about the ankles, causing her to relapse into a sulky gloom.

"The salubrious air of Broadway will do you

good, I hope, Cissie," Louisiana remarked severely. "I've stood your nonsense for six days because I had to. Now come to, please! Just because you've got a fool play, and a fool manager to waste his money on you, you needn't try the Duse-Bernhardt-Ellen Terry pose on old friends!"

Miss Pyce promptly descended several steps and began to converse about the New York weather, which she said was trying to English nerves.

When they arrived at Brainard's house, they found that Farson had not yet come in from rehearsal. The two women were shown into the little den behind the library, while Brainard glanced over his mail.

Five minutes had scarcely elapsed when a shriek came from the inner room, and the door was thrown violently open. Louisiana stood on the threshold, clasping against her breast a little picture framed in a thin gold molding.

"Where did you get *this*?" she demanded breathlessly.

Brainard looked at her admiringly. As she stood there against the dark shadows of the inner room, the sun from the window falling in a great gold bar across her auburn hair and violet-colored traveling dress — thin, erect, full of the passionate eagerness of youth — he saw Farson's character created.

"Bravo, Gertrude!" he cried.

"Tell me, where did you find *this*?" she insisted impatiently.

"What have you got there?" he asked, taking the picture from her hands.

Her face followed his with curiosity and expectation, her eyes searching him.

"Where did you get it?" she repeated.

"This water color? I picked it up in Arizona — out there where my mine is located. It's a long story — *my* story. I'll tell it to you some of these days."

"Now! Tell it to me now!" she insisted, with something more than childish impetuosity.

But just then Cissie Pyce, patting the marvelous folds of her hair, came from the inner room.

"Not now," Brainard replied, looking meaningfully at Miss Pyce.

Taking the water color from Louisiana's reluctant hands, he replaced it above the desk in his private study, where it had always hung since he had moved into this house.

Farson came in presently, and in the flurry of his surprise and greetings the subject of the water color was apparently forgotten. Now and again, however, during their lively breakfast, Brainard found Louisiana's gray eyes resting on him with a peculiar intentness. She did not seem so much ex-

cited over the prospect of playing Gertrude in *Her Great Adventure* as he had expected.

After the meal Cissie tore herself away reluctantly, and the three others went over the new play, the author explaining some of his ideas, and seeking to get the young actress interested in her part. Louisiana listened, but evidently her thoughts were far away. Farson was visibly disappointed.

"I think Miss Delacourt must be tired after her journey and the early landing," Brainard interposed in kindly fashion.

"Of course — pardon me!" the young dramatist said, throwing down his manuscript. "Let me set you down at your hotel on the way to the theater."

"No, you are already late for the rehearsal. I will take Miss Delacourt home when the motor comes back. I have something to say to her."

Farson left with reluctance, after making an engagement for the morrow with the young actress.

"And I'll know my lines by that time," she promised him.

No sooner had the door closed upon the secretary than she leaped to her feet.

"Now for the story! And may I see the picture again?"

Brainard fetched the little water color and placed it in her hands.

* "As I told you," he said, "it's by way of being the story of my own life — at least, of the only part that counts as life!"

"Yes?" she said expectantly.

Looking over her shoulders, he pointed to a spot in the distant mountain background of the sketch.

"In there is the site of the great Melody mine —"

"Melody — what? Why, what do you mean?" the girl stammered in renewed excitement.

"The Melody mine — that's the name of the mine about which there is the litigation, you know. That's where all the money for the theater came from. It's the famous pot of gold — my Aladdin's lamp — only it's likely to change owners."

"But why did you call it Melody?" Louisiana demanded, with glistening eyes.

"That's all in the story, too," laughed Brainard.

"Then tell it to me — *all!*"

She dropped the picture into her lap, and, holding her little hands tightly clasped, fastened her eyes on Brainard's face, as if what he had to say was of momentous interest to her. But that, he reflected, somewhat flattered, was just Louisiana's way.

"Here goes, then, Miss Delacourt, for the story

of my life, which explains that water-color sketch being in my possession !”

And Brainard retold the tale of *his* great adventure since he played the part of good Samaritan to the dying stranger. It took some time to tell the story, and he did not hurry. The motor came back and waited below, while he went into all the details of the story with which we are familiar.

At certain places Louisiana opened her lips, as if she could not control an exclamation; but when Brainard paused, she merely motioned him impatiently to continue. As he told of his dropping from the train at the lonely water tank, and of the strange little girl who had guided him to Gunnison's shack, Louisiana's mobile lips parted in a curious smile. She was not so much interested in his Mexican adventures, nor in the European chapters, but when he described his first visit to the deserted house on the hill above Monument, the girl's face sobered to a wistful expression, and she caught her breath as if she might sob.

“And there I missed her by a few weeks !” Brainard said.

Louisiana laughed aloud, as if it were all a joke.

“It sounds,” Brainard remarked, having rapidly concluded the account of his experiences as a miner, “like a dime-novel yarn, but it happens to be all

true. And throughout my adventures, all through these six years, I've clung to the idea of just being the trustee for this unknown lady — this Miss Melody Krutzmacht, or whatever her real name may be. I think that is what has saved me from becoming a plain gambler, and the whole business no better than the melodrama Farson and I saw, *The Stolen Bonds*, where we met my old friend Hollinger. I've got Melody to thank for saving my moral character, as well as doing a lot else for me. But I haven't much hope now of finding the lady, to thank her for anything!"

"She ought to have something to thank *you* for, I should say!" Miss Delacourt exclaimed warmly.

"I'm afraid not. I really feel in my bones that those crooks will beat me out of the property, unless a miracle comes along. I've been a poor sort of steward while I had charge of the money. I put every cent I squeezed out of the bankers into developing the mine, and saved myself by a fluke with the sulfur wells. Then all the money they brought in I've sunk in this theater game, without much to show for it, as you know."

"Didn't you keep a few dollars for yourself?" Louisiana inquired with childish directness.

"Oh, there are a few thousands lying around — enough, young lady, to have kept you going in

Europe another year, and to put on this play of Farson's. That wipes the slate clean, and I must pawn these duds to stake myself!"

"Maybe this play will make money," the actress suggested thoughtfully.

"That will be the miracle, then!" Brainard exclaimed whimsically. "It will be a greater miracle than the one that made me into a millionaire."

"Don't you believe in Mr. Farson's play?"

"Of course! But I don't believe in our luck, nor in the people's taste in drama, as I once did."

The girl sat staring at the little picture, clutching its frame with her hands. After a time she looked up into Brainard's face with a winning expression about her small mouth.

"Will you give me this?"

Brainard hesitated.

"I would give you pretty much anything else I have," he replied. "But, you see, that sketch is all I have of Melody — supposing it was hers! You understand?"

"You have a good deal of feeling for this Melody?"

"Yes," Brainard admitted, slightly reddening, and added more lightly, "She's been my benefactress, you see."

The girl raised her gray eyes and looked stead-

fastly at him. Her face was older, Brainard suddenly perceived, than he had remembered it. Yes, the trip abroad had done much for the wild young girl.

“I want *this* !” she insisted.

“Then you shall have it !” Brainard exclaimed impulsively, and added with another blush, “It’s about all that I can give you !”

“I know it — and that’s why I want it so much !”

After that there was a conscious silence between them, until Miss Delacourt rose to leave. She walked slowly to the door, as if loath to go ; then she turned and reached out both hands to Brainard. He took them, and they stood facing each other mutely.

For the first time in all these years his loyalty to his unknown mistress completely vanished. The ideal of Melody had faded from his mind.

XVI

If the young dramatist had been disappointed by Miss Delacourt's apparent lack of interest in his play and in the part of Gertrude on the occasion of that first luncheon, he was quickly reassured by the energetic way in which, beginning with the next day, she threw herself into her work. As soon as she had time "to roll up her sleeves," as she expressed it, she plunged into the rehearsals, an incarnation of work and enthusiasm.

To be sure, she put the author through some uncomfortable hours while she criticized his piece and suggested many important changes with her usual frankness and point. She "combed it out," as she said, line by line, and convinced him, against his will, that he should cut freely and sharpen his dialogue all through. Moreover, she set him right on several subtle points in the heroine's psychology.

"She knows what she's about, too," Farson reported to Brainard. "I don't see how she's done it, but in her flip way she's absorbed a lot in Europe. She knows what all of them are doing. She was quoting Brieux, Barrie, and Shaw at me

last night all in one gulp. I must rewrite that third curtain to suit her ladyship."

"You must remember that you are dealing with a star," Brainard observed dryly. "Louisiana may be new to the firmament, but she knows instinctively what belongs to her starship."

In much the same manner the new leading lady took hold of the other players, and "shook 'em all by the neck and woke 'em up." There were but three weeks left, and she wore the company almost to the point of revolt by the long rehearsals she demanded. When they grumbled, she read them a characteristic lecture.

"It's your last stunt for the old People's. You know you have all got a lot out of the concern — for one thing, better pay than some of you will ever see again; and much more besides. So show that you've got something warm inside your anatomy where your hearts ought to be — at least a dog's gratitude for the hand that's fed you. The piece is all right, too; it will make the jaded pulse of Broadway flutter like an *ingénue*. Just you give the public a chance to discover that here is a play as *is* a play!"

During these strenuous weeks of rehearsal Brainard was absent most of the time in Arizona and Washington, where the already celebrated case of the Krutzmacht widow was now imminent.

He had come to believe that Farson had more than a professional interest in his Gertrude, and he preferred to be absent from the scene of the wooing; but on the day of the dress rehearsal of *Her Great Adventure* he returned to New York and dropped in at the theater on his way home, slipping into a seat in the rear of the dim house.

The piece went with amazing swiftness and smoothness, thanks to the hard work Miss Delacourt had got out of the company. Absorbed by the play, Brainard was completely taken out of the wearying round of his daily perplexities.

"It is a play," he muttered excitedly to himself, "and they do it wonderfully well. That girl is almost great. If the public will only come to see her, and not believe what the newspapers say, they'll understand. She's an actress!"

He repeated these warm words of praise a little later in Miss Delacourt's dressing room, where he went to congratulate the actress. Louisiana was in street costume, buttoning up her gloves, when he arrived.

"I saw you in the back row," she said in reply. "Any better news?"

"I am afraid not. The first court reserved its decision. They put up an amazing case, the impudent rascals! They almost made me believe them in spite of myself. I must tell you all

about it sometime. I think we shall be able to pull off *Her Great Adventure* just in time before the sheriff closes the doors."

He laughed good-humoredly at the situation, and handed her his cigarette case. Louisiana lighted a cigarette, then said abruptly:

"I hope you won't be angry with me. I've borrowed something of yours while you were away. Couldn't wait to get permission."

"Honored that you found anything worth taking! What is it?"

"I borrowed a new name for myself!"

"I remember you said that we had ruined the old one for you!" he laughed. "You were sitting over there in the corner, too mad to cry, when you said it."

"After making such a guy of myself as Cordelia I couldn't bear to see the old name on the billboards. Besides, I think I like this one better, anyway."

"What is it?"

"I'm calling myself Melody —"

Brainard's expression changed suddenly, and he turned away.

"You don't like it," she said coaxingly. "But it's a pretty name!"

"Melody what?" he asked with a touch of sternness.

"Oh, just Melody White — that's all."

"But Melody was *her* name," he protested.

"I know! You told me so. But that Melody doesn't exist really; she's just a name — an idea you have. I took a fancy to it — my dotty point, see? I'm superstitious about it. I want to make this play a great big success, as you made the mine," she said swiftly. "So don't be cross with me for making free with your unknown lady love's first name!"

Brainard smiled in spite of himself at the girl's insistence on a trivial thing.

"I don't know why I should object," he said slowly.

But he realized that even in speaking he did object. It was one thing to ask him for Melody's sketch, the only memento he had of his mistress, but another to take this liberty with the mythical Melody's name, and to post it up for the whole world to see on a theatrical billboard. In a moment, however, Brainard's common sense came back to him.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't take that name as well as any other, if you can make it right with Farson and the manager. I should think they might object, after all the press work they have done for Louisiana Delacourt."

"I can manage *them* all right!"

The new Melody puffed these gentlemen aside in a cloud of smoke.

They drove uptown together in Brainard's car, but neither spoke. The girl, Brainard observed, was unwontedly excited, her little hands gnawing at the muff in her lap, her keen eyes devouring the passing crowd on the streets. Brainard, who was tired in mind and body, was content merely to watch his companion from his corner through half-closed eyes.

After all the hard work of the past weeks, Louisiana — or, as she now preferred to call herself, Melody — was marvelously fresh and pretty. She had the lithe body, the deep-set eyes, the sensitive, mobile features of a real temperament. He wondered whether she cared deeply for Farson. The young secretary was undoubtedly attractive, and should this play bring him the attention it ought, he might become a good dramatist; but if the girl had an ambition to be a great actress, she had better not tie herself yet to any man. And it comforted Brainard curiously to remember how unmercifully she had handled the young man's play.

"*The Star of the Seven Seas* is to be withdrawn," she said at last, breaking in on his meditation. "Only two weeks' run — dead failure! Cissie thinks New York audiences are exceedingly

provincial. She is going back to dear old Lunnon as soon as she can get there. Maybe I shall be able to help her later."

As the car stopped before a third-rate hotel in the Forties, Brainard inquired :

"So Cissie has moved from the Astor?"

"Yes, Cissie is visiting me now," the actress replied.

"Times change — for us all!"

"They do that — sure — and for the better sometimes!" the young actress averred with a contented smile.

XVII

LATTERLY the critics had completely ignored the existence of the People's Theater. Its announcements aroused no more public interest than the program of an ethical culture society. Brainard, who had at last learned the real importance of publicity, feared lest this same contemptuous indifference on the part of the press might bury his young secretary's play in hasty and undeserved oblivion.

But as he sank into his seat on the following Monday night he was surprised and relieved at the size and the character of the audience. All the leading critics of the metropolitan press were there, also many of "those who know," and whose verdict is useful indirectly. There were some theatrical people, and a few fashionable folk from Mrs. Donnie Pearmain's world. The rest were of the ordinary, semi-intelligent theater-going sort.

It was an ideal house before which to try out the new piece. If the play had anything enduring in it, there were those present who could recognize the fact. Ned Farson had many personal friends

in the city — college mates at various clubs, young literary aspirants, dramatists, newspaper and professional men. Among these, evidently, the word had been passed around that Ned's play was to be produced — and that was enough. Louisiana had also worked Cissie, and Cissie Pyce had reached other professional circles.

"And now for the play," Brainard sighed, dropping his glasses after this preliminary reconnaissance, "and for our one actress!"

At last, in the hush of a well-trained, expectant audience, the heavy curtains drew apart noiselessly, revealing the first scene — a rough shack in a mining camp, with a splendid background of mountains and desert.

There was no doubt from the first curtain that the piece would go — would hold this audience, any audience, by the simple power of its story, its honest pathos and humor, its vitality and veracity. But it was not until the first scene of the third act that the people gathered there awoke to the fact that a real actress, and one whose very name had not been heard before that night, was taking this piece, and the part of the Western girl, Gertrude, to present herself as an artist. "Melody White" was her name on the program.

"Who is she?" was the whisper that ran around the theater.

Certainly she was not the Louisiana Delacourt whose liberties with Cordelia had made a farce of *Lear*! Quiet, almost subdued in her methods, with an extraordinary variety of power, she gave the lines — many of which had a real poetic quality — with a musical accent that swept over the ears of the audience like a soft, summer wave. Her face was lighted with a glow; her slightest gesture seemed to reveal something of the character — the free, fearless, capable woman of the great West.

As the play went on, hardened theatergoers looked at one another in wonder and joy. Here, beyond the shadow of doubt, was a fresh talent, as Brainard had predicted.

At the close of the act, after the furious applause, the flowers, and the curtain calls for company, actress, and author, there was a clamor behind the scenes for a speech from the founder. The company gathered about Brainard and insisted that he "must say something."

"You talked to 'em when I was down, do you remember?" Melody remarked. "I think you ought to say a word now that I am up!"

So for the second and last time Brainard faced an audience in the People's Theater, and the irrepressible young actress was the occasion for both his speeches. In a few rapid words he re-

viewed the purposes he had had in mind in opening the theater, two years before.

"We have made many mistakes, of course. Perhaps some of you may think that we have made more mistakes than anything else. We have learned a great deal; and first of all, that in our country there is no 'people' — no *one* public. At least, they haven't patronized their own theater! But I can't think that we have altogether failed, after such a night as this.

"One of our desires was to produce truthful American plays of American life. *Her Great Adventure* is American to the core, and you seem to think it good. Another object was to discover and educate persons of unusual dramatic talent, to create artists and free them from the base compromises of the commercial stage. To-night you have witnessed the début of such a talent. Having given the world *Her Great Adventure* and Miss Melody White, who shall say that we have failed? . . ."

After the play, the company gathered in the library for supper, to celebrate their triumph. It was Brainard's custom to give such a feast at every *première*, but to-night there was among the fifty or sixty guests an unaccustomed air of success and intoxication that bubbled into speeches and songs and kept them until long after midnight. At last, after dreary failures, contempt, and

neglect, the People's had achieved a real, big, popular success! The critics had scattered to tell all New York to go to the People's Theater in West Twelfth Street, to see *Her Great Adventure* and a real American actress.

"We shan't be closing right off, I reckon," Miss White whispered across the table to Brainard.

"Not as soon as I expected!" he replied with a smile.

When the party finally broke up, he looked to see the successful author lead away his triumphant star; but, to his surprise, Farson went off with some young men, to finish his triumph with them at a club. Brainard questioned the actress with his eyes.

"Yes, you've got to take me home in your car! Cissie has left. Don't you see that I have waited until all the women are gone, and now you are making me ask you for a ride outright?"

"I merely wished to efface myself before the hero of the occasion," he replied joyfully.

"No need of such consideration. He's left me to cab it up alone."

"Have you already had the usual tiff between two collaborators?"

"Oh, no," she drawled, as the car started with them. "Not at all! But you see, he wanted to push the contract."

"What do you mean?"

"Ned asked me yesterday to marry him. It would be a convenient arrangement, you know; he could write the plays and I make 'em famous!"

"Don't put it that way!" Brainard protested quickly. "He's the best of fellows, and I know that he cares for you."

"It won't hurt him, I reckon. Clever boy — my, how big his head will be after to-night, though!"

The young actress yawned, and snuggled under the fur robe.

"How about yours?"

"I'm just happy. You see, I was right. The play is going to be a great money-maker."

"It certainly looks that way to-night. That means that we shall be able to keep the theater open till the end of the season, and close with the band playing. For all of which we have to thank you!"

"And your clever secretary! Tell me, have you heard anything more about the case?"

"The lawyers telephoned me late this afternoon that the judge had given his decree — in *their* favor."

Her hand stole across to his under the robe.

"Of course, we appeal," Brainard went on;

"but they've got a strong case. Fraud, of course, but we can't prove it."

"Why not? Tell me more about the case. I've been meaning to ask you all along; but this play has filled every corner of my little head. Now I can think of something else. Come on upstairs. I don't feel the least bit sleepy, and you can tell me all about your case — why they won when it's a fraud."

"That's simple enough," Brainard began, when they had seated themselves in the actress's tiny parlor. "This man Krutzmacht, it seems, had married his stenographer out there in San Francisco. At least, she's got a perfectly good certificate."

"But how could he have really married her, if he was already married?"

"You mean if he was already married to the lost Melody's mother? But *was* he married to her mother? We can't find any record of it. Nobody knows, unless we could find Melody herself, and I have given up all hope of that. Krutzmacht might have deceived her, too, you know."

"Why, of course he was married to Melody's mother — and wasn't divorced, either!"

"What do you know of it?"

"Stupid!" she said gently, rising and putting

her hands on his shoulders. "Can't you see that — I am Melody — yes, the real Melody!"

"Louisiana —"

"Name of my mother's State. I made up Delacourt for the stage. Louisiana Delacourt was to be my stage name but Cordelia spoiled it."

She laughed at his astonishment.

"And you are Melody Krutzmacht?"

"Lord, no! Melody White. Krutzmacht wasn't any father of mine, thank goodness!"

"And your mother?"

"Was Mrs. Della White — legally married to Herbert Krutzmacht in the American consulate at Guatemala City. He met mama down there, and married her, when I was a child, and adopted me, too. I've got everything necessary to prove what I say. So you just telegraph that judge to hold his horses and get ready to write another decree!"

"And they hadn't been divorced?" Brainard pursued, bewildered.

"Not that! He was bad enough, gave mother a dreadful life, took her up to that desolate mining town in Arizona, and left her there. Poor ma! But he sent her money when he had any — even that last time when he was in New York — and always called her his wife. I have letters to show it."

"But you weren't his child!" Brainard mused.

"Only by adoption; but I am my mother's only living relative, and she died *after* him!"

"So, as the old man seems to have had no other living heirs to make claim, it is all your money!"

Melody shook her head smilingly.

"Not quite that! A good part of it must belong to my able trustee, who discovered the sulfur and made it pay. Dad Krutzmacht couldn't have had very much to the good when he died. He wasn't a nice sort of man, Dad Krutzmacht," she added thoughtfully.

"Well, he left you a nice little fortune — something that should run into the millions. You will have to think more tenderly of the old fellow."

"Ugh! How I hated him and Monument! That's why I dropped his name. And just as soon as mother was gone, I fled."

"In the night — rode down to the railroad. I remember it all. But tell me, where did you go then, and what happened to you? How did you escape the search I made for you all over the world?"

"That's *my* story! I'll tell it to you some day — how I dishwashed and cooked on a ranch for a living, peddled corsets, and worked in a factory — it's a long yarn. Some of it is in the

play; I told Ned the amusing things. But he has fixed it up a whole lot — I don't know myself!"

"It must have been hard for a girl."

"It was, but I am not sorry. It gave you a chance to work the mine, for one thing."

There was a pause, and then Brainard rose to leave, saying:

"Well, Miss White —"

"Just plain Melody, please! I like the name — don't you?"

"It means a good deal to me, as I told you."

The girl blushed, remembering what Brainard had said about his unknown mistress, and drawled:

"But you didn't like my taking it a little bit."

"No," Brainard admitted. "But I don't mind now."

"You oughtn't to, really, seeing that it is my own name by baptism."

They both laughed at this. Melody danced about the small room, woke up the new Boston bull, and made him dance with her. She was once more the child Brainard had first known at the opening of the theater.

"You'll have to squelch that woman who's trying to take poor mama's place," she remarked, in a pause.

"Of course I shall attend to that at once —

and all other business until I can straighten out your property and hand it over to you clear of tangles."

"What do you mean? Do you think I am going to take your old mine?" Melody fairly shouted. "It's yours, yours, all yours! You won the first stake with your nerve, and you made the rest of it. And you'll keep it, too, my friend — at least, most of it. Perhaps some day, when I get the fool-bug in my head, and want a company of my own, I'll come around and call on you for a couple of hundred thousand."

Brainard looked at the girl almost severely.

"All the property is *yours*, of course. Krutzmacht meant it so. Your name was the last word on his lips. I have been merely your guardian. It would be impossible for me to keep it now. You can see that it would be entirely different from what it has been while you were only a name to me."

"I see what *you* are," she replied slowly. "The honestest, most generous, most unselfish of men — and the foolishhest! Come, let's stop this swapping of compliments like a couple of children — 'You take it, George!' 'No, you take it, Edith!' . . . So old Pap Krutz wanted me to have his money when he was dying! I suppose he thought to make it square for what he

put mother and me through. He treated us like *peons*!"

Brainard laughed.

"You may think differently about your millions in the morning. We'll wait till then. Good night, and double congratulations, Melody!" he said.

"Yes, we'd quite forgotten how good I was in the play. I'll send you those papers about mother to-morrow morning, and you see that the *scala-wags* don't make good! I can't be bothered with law suits and things until after the season closes. I'm making *my* great adventure now, the same as you did once! I don't want to be disturbed until I have carried it through."

"I'll see that you are not disturbed. Before I go, please tell me why you didn't let me know the truth when you found that picture in my room?"

"I had my idea," Melody replied vaguely, her eyes shining into his. "I shouldn't have given it away now — not until I had really made good — if it hadn't been for that woman winning the law suit. When I discovered what the trouble was, I had to tell, of course."

"I almost wish you hadn't!" Brainard exclaimed, starting for the door.

"Why?"

“I think you can tell why !”

And he was gone, leaving Melody with a thoughtful smile on her pretty face.

“I believe,” she remarked after a time, as in rapid, unstarlike haste she divested herself of her clothes, “that I shall find a way of compelling him to keep the money — somehow or other !”

XVIII

As he had promised, Brainard attended to the business affairs of Melody's estate. The lawyers easily obtained a stay of proceedings and a retrial. With the proof of Krutzmacht's real marriage to the mother of the young actress, the case dropped like a cracked egg, before it got to court. Hollinger and the counsel, who had been "staking" Miss Walters in her attempt, foresaw dangerous consequences and withdrew precipitately from the case. After the smoke had cleared away, Brainard did not forget the plea that Hollinger had made in behalf of Krutzmacht's former stenographer. He resolved to use whatever influence he might have with the new heiress to secure for Lorilla Walters a modest crumb from the rich cake she had fought for that would make her independent for life and allow her to withdraw permanently from the stage. The last that Brainard heard of the versatile fight-trust magnate he was employed in the capacity of financial adviser to a Chinese prince, who had conceived the idea of developing a railroad in his province with the aid of Western capital.

Hollinger, whose headquarters were generally in London, achieved a signal success in this kind of financial diplomacy for which his temperament and his morals both fitted him.

After the suit had been disposed of, Brainard amused himself by preparing an elaborate report of his trusteeship of the estate, in which everything was accounted for, to the original items he had spent on his first journey. He also put his own affairs in order, in preparation for that day at the close of the theatrical season when the young actress would deign to give her attention to business matters. She was too busy at present.

For the improbable had really happened. *Her Great Adventure* proved to be the one undoubted theatrical success of the past four seasons. That intelligent first-night audience had gone home and told its friends that they must not miss the new play at the queer theater in West Twelfth Street. They, in turn, had promptly told their friends, and the news had quickly become contagious. Instead of a two weeks' run the house sold out until the end of June, and a road company was already being prepared to satisfy the curiosity of the provinces. Incredible fact! The People's Theater was making money, even with its low scale of prices.

At the close of the fourth week, when the new

manager came to see Brainard in regard to the next season, Brainard smiled at him in amusement.

"I'm out of the theater business, Leaventritt. The place isn't mine any longer."

"I saw that you had won your suit."

"Yes, but the theater isn't mine."

"Sold out?" the manager asked, a disgusted look on his eager face.

"Not that, but I'm out of it, just the same. You'll have to see Miss White about another season. Perhaps she can help you out."

"And just when the blamed sucker had fallen into the mint, so to speak!" the manager complained to a subordinate. "So it's up to Miss Melody White, is it? Well, that lady's no sucker. I'll have to show her good cause!"

The next day, as Brainard was superintending the dismantling of his rooms, word was brought to him that Miss White had called and wished to speak to him.

"Sure it isn't Mr. Farson that Miss White wishes to see?" he asked the servant, thinking of the new play which Farson had begun for the actress.

"Sure it isn't!" a laughing voice answered from the hall, and Melody pushed her head through

the doorway. "You're pulling out?" she asked in surprise, remarking the disheveled condition of the pleasant library. "Where to?"

"Don't know yet — just stripping for action," Brainard replied buoyantly. "You gather a lot of moss about you whenever you plant yourself." He pointed to the books and pictures ranged along the walls, ready for the packing-cases. "And one sinks into the moss, too, so that it becomes hard to tear up," he said less cheerfully.

Melody sat down on a lounge, crossed her knees, and slowly pulled off her long gloves, as if she had come to stay.

"My!" Brainard remarked, looking attentively at her clothes, "how dressy the lady is getting to be!"

"Marks of my position," Melody replied, with elaborate indifference. "It makes Cissie's eyes water when the things come home. It's almost as good fun as telling her that I will try to save her a small part in the new play, or something in one of the road companies."

"Haven't you paid Cissie in full for all her airs? Or do you still get amusement out of teasing the poor thing?"

"One has to do something, you know," Melody sighed.

"The *ennui* of success has come so soon!" Brainard mocked. "You'll be taking to 'citis and lap dogs. But I have a document that may distract your starship's idle moments meanwhile, and give you something to think about."

He stepped into the inner room and returned with a typed manuscript.

"Another play?" Melody inquired in a languid tone. "Have you taken to writing plays, too?"

"Not exactly," Brainard replied, running over the sheets.

"Leaventritt came to see me yesterday," Melody remarked carelessly.

"I sent him."

"So he said."

"You want to be careful. There's a mercenary streak in his blood, and success is likely to bring it out; but he's intelligent and honest enough."

"You're still set on making an idiot of yourself about the money and things?"

"If you mean that I am still determined to render unto Melody the riches that are Melody's by rights, why, yes!"

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Any one of a number of things," Brainard replied cheerfully. While Melody negligently turned over the pages of his elaborate report, he continued musingly: "It was just six years

ago this month when my play was turned down — the last one I ever wrote. I walked back up the avenue with the manuscript in my pocket, feeling that the bottom of the world had dropped out. I was a forlorn, broken specimen. It was a day something like this, too.” He glanced at the lowering April sky. “It is very different now. I’m not much richer than I was then, but I am a totally different being. In fact, I think now I could call myself a man !”

“I think so,” Melody agreed, in a rather doleful voice.

“And a man can always face the world with a light heart, no matter how light his pockets happen to be.”

Melody nodded sympathetically, and murmured, — “for the great adventure !”

“Yes ! Life is the great adventure !”

After a long silence, Melody looked up into Brainard’s face and stretched out her hands to him.

“Won’t you take me — with you — on the great adventure ?”

Brainard grasped her hands, and, leaning forward, tried to read the full purpose in the gray eyes.

“Melody !”

“Must I ask twice ?” she said, blushing. “It’s

more than most women have the nerve to do once. You see, after you left that night, I guessed — and —”

As Brainard took her in his arms she threw back her head, and, holding him away, said :

“And you’ll have to take the Melody mine along with Melody. I said I’d make you keep the old thing !”

XIX

"AND what shall we do with the theater?" Brainard asked, in a lucid interval, early in June. "Shall we sell it to Einstein & Flukeheimer for vaudeville? Or shall we keep it for a certain American actress when she wearies of matrimony? Or shall we try to put new life into the great Idea, and keep on giving the dear Public what bores it, because it's good for the dear Public to be bored?"

"I never thought much of your great Idea," Melody confessed candidly. "The trouble with it is that it doesn't do any good to give people what they aren't willing to work for. You've got to earn your bread, so to speak, in order to digest it properly. The Public's got to want good plays and good acting enough to pay the proper price for 'em. You can't get people interested in an art they don't understand and don't want enough to work for. Let 'em give themselves the best they can understand and like until they kick for better!"

"That even I have begun to comprehend, O Minerva and Melody in one! Still, there are

exceptions to your philosophical principle — for example, yourself, goddess, and me, who digest with an excellent appetite our heaven-sent cake.”

“Didn’t you earn it — and me? As few men ever earned the love they take! And I reckon I earned you, too.”

There followed an unluuid interval.

“But what, then,” Brainard resumed, after the interval, “shall we do with one large, commodious theater building; also one great Idea with a hole punched in it, through which the gas has escaped?”

“I’ve been thinking of that problem, too. We might turn it into a coöperative company, and let the players own it and run it to suit themselves.”

“Even into the ground?”

“Just that! But there are some good heads in the company, and it will give them all a chance. Besides, we can afford it, dear!”

“Yes, we can much better afford to give it away than to keep it running,” Brainard admitted. “As your husband, I can’t countenance all the follies I put on you as mere guardian!”

So the last night of the season, a warm June night, the People’s players got together at the close of the performance in the pleasant library of the theater, and Brainard and Melody made them

two little speeches. First, Brainard explained to the players the plan of a coöperative stock company, in which all members were to own shares, with a board of directors, of which Leaventritt was to be chairman and Farson secretary. Then Melody said :

“You heard the boss on the new plan. You’re in great luck, let me tell you ! And you will be awful chumps if you fight among yourselves, or otherwise don’t make a go of it.” Melody looked severely at Cissie Pyce, who was seated obscurely in the rear of the room. “Of course, you’ll all think yourselves Coquelins and Sarahs. Well, you’re not. Mind what the manager says. You’ve got the prettiest, nicest theater in the city, a fair company, and a good start with Mr. Farson’s new play. I shan’t be with you next season. As you’ve doubtless heard, I’ve taken a new manager — for life — and we’re going abroad on our first tour. So buck up ! Don’t fight ! Good luck !”

And thus was formed the independent Company of Actors, with one Edgar Brainard as honorary president, and Mrs. Edgar Brainard, *née* Melody White, as honorary vice president. All the company came to the wedding, and later trooped to the dock to see the couple depart for Europe.

A floral offering from the company — an ele-

gant version of the great scene in Farson's play, done in roses and carnations — filled their state-room to the exclusion of much else. It was labeled, "Their Great Adventure."

"That's right," Melody said when they went to inspect their quarters. "It's life, not art!"

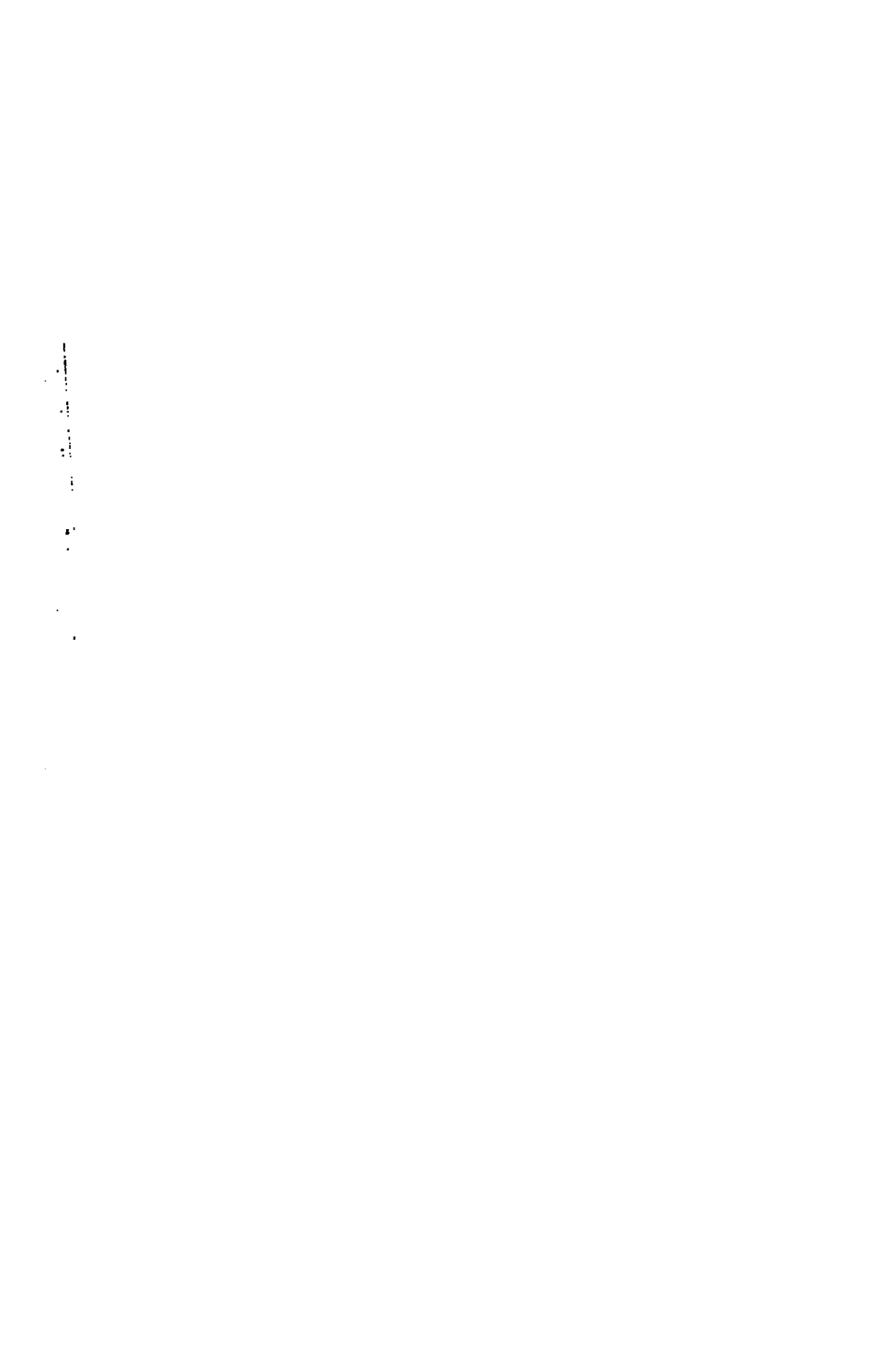
"We've made a fair start, don't you think?" Brainard added.

Melody replied by raising her lips for the expected kiss.

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